

CHINESE LITERATURE

Wall of Bronze

Starting with the eighth chapter, we present here Liu Ching's novel of the Chinese people's War of Liberation. The following is a brief résumé of the first seven chapters:

In the beginning of August 1947, in accordance with Chairman Mao Tse-tung's plan of military strategy, a Field Army of the People's Liberation Army is sent to the northern front of Northwest China. Its mission is to attack the town of Yulin in the northern part of Shensi province, and by this means draw into the area and destroy major Kuomintang forces under the command of warlord Hu Tsung-nan. As part of the organization established to supply grain to the PLA rear line units, a temporary grain station is set up in Shajya Village. The ideas and working methods of Tsow, chief of the district in which Shajya Village is located, prove incompatible with the requirements of the war situation that is developing according to plan. Nor does Tsow acknowledge the new political maturity of Shih Defu, a young peasant Communist who has just returned with a commendation for exemplary work after three months' service at the front as a stretcher bearer. Tsow keeps all the cadres of the district government working in the grain station, instead of sending them out to mobilize the people. At this time, Commissioner Geh is ordered to the main station at Chenchuan, thirty li from Shajya Village, to take charge of the shipment and storage of grain for the entire region. On the road during an air-raid, he meets Shih Defu, who displays the utmost calmness in directing grain porters to safety. Geh passes through Shajya Village on his way to Chenchuan and straightens out Tsow's thinking by an explanation of the spirit of Chairman Mao's strategy. Geh recommends that village cadres should run the station at Shajya Village and that Shih Defu be put in charge. This frees the district cadres for their other duties. To attack the PLA Field Army besieging Yulin, one part of Hu Tsung-nan's forces cuts through the desert north of the Great Wall, while another, as yet still south of Shajya Village, is moving up the Hsienyang-Yulin highway. When this news reaches Shajya Village, Jin, Communist Party secretary for the district, leads cadres to the northern section of the district to manage grain shipment. Tsow takes other cadres to the southern section to organize guerillas and make other preparations for the war. Shih Defu awaits orders for his grain station from Commissioner Geh in Chenchuan. Thus, the battle of Shajya Village, the turning point of Northwest China front, expands.

VIII

Not since the retreat from Yen-an five months before had there been such excitement in the territory lying between the Wuding River and the Yellow River. A great wave of battle preparations under the direction

of Party members and government cadres was seething in thousands of villages and hamlets. Moreover, all non-military government organizations, schools, banks, trading companies, factories — including the personnel and their families — began a great exodus toward several ferrying points along the Yellow River. Starting from the thirteenth, the main highway from Michih and Wulungpu to the city of Hsia, on the water's edge, was choked with a continuous flow of people and pack animals.

This news was brought to Shajya Village on the morning of the fourteenth by the peasants delivering grain from neighboring districts. Near noon, civilian organization personnel and their families from the counties of Hengshan and Chenchuan passed through Shajya Village on their way to Hsia. It was plain that the situation was very tense. Although the number of people delivering grain from the three districts to the east was sharply reduced that day, men from the rear line units of the Field Army stationed in the district of Shajya Village came as usual to draw their supplies. Characteristically, they were quite casual about the changed circumstances. In reply to the questions of the grain carriers and the villagers, they explained that the movement of government personnel did not mean that northern Shensi was being abandoned. It was a temporary departure to avoid unnecessary losses. One soldier, standing on the high level in front of the grain station, guaranteed that the Field Army would finish off Hu Tsung-nan's forces in a shorter period than the time it would take the enemy to reach the battlefield. He pleaded with them to have courage, to do their part in preparing for battle, in supporting the front. . . .

The maintenance of the station at Shajya Village, with its over one hundred piculs of grain, was going to be difficult. Many people were surprised that a young fellow like Shih Defu should dare to undertake such a task. Some worried for his sake. True, he had been a model stretcher bearer; but to run the grain station at a time like this was an incalculably heavier responsibility than the ones he had borne at the front. Phoenix's father even said Shih Defu was a "clod," not to be compared with a clever person like Shih Yungkung, for instance. (As a matter of fact, the old man's low opinion of Shih Defu's intelligence was one of the reasons he opposed the militiaman's marriage to his daughter.) Shih Defu's mother thought he was over-estimating his own ability, but what was the use of talking — for several years now she hadn't been able to control him.

Shih Defu knew his work wouldn't be easy, if anything it would become harder. Yet when his superiors assigned him this duty, how could he refuse? Seven years ago, when he was eighteen, he had joined the Party. He was a hired hand then of Huai-tsung, the landlord in Kungjya Gully. Ever since that day, whenever the Party asked him to do a job, the word "no" was never heard to pass his lips, come thunder, lightning, hell or high water. Now, the whole Border Area — from Chairman Mao down to every single peasant — was engaged in a struggle to annihilate

the enemy. The thought that serving with district chief Tsow in the guerillas would be much easier than his work in the grain station never even occurred to Shih Defu. . . .

The movement of personnel toward the Yellow River worried Shih Yungkung. Every time porters arrived with grain, Shih Yungkung plied them with questions on what was happening in the east, what were the developments in the south. . . .

"You know the general picture," Shih Defu censured him, "so why keep asking? Asking isn't going to change things. We'll get ourselves into trouble if you don't take care to avoid mistakes in the accounts. Giving out wrong receipts will be bad too."

Busy weighing grain, Pa Hu snorted with scorn, "Asking questions is a pile of crap!" He always agreed with Shih Defu. After he heard the Army comrades' explanation, he concerned himself only with his work.

Shih Yungkung mournfully clucked his tongue. He hadn't dreamed the situation would be so tight. The anxiety which he had felt when Yen-an was evacuated settled on him again like a pall. The cadres were alone in the storage cave, and he asked doubtfully, "Do you think Chairman Mao will cross the Yellow River this time?"

"You're just like you were last spring!" exclaimed Shih Defu. "So that's what was behind all your questions! Well, you don't have to waste your time worrying. When Comrade Chou En-lai addressed the mass meeting at Chenwu Caves, he said Chairman Mao would be together with our army and our people wiping out the enemy. Now that the enemy has been lured up in this direction, do you really think he'd cross the river?"

Shih Yungkung sighed faintly, but said no more. He judged the conditions in northern Shensi entirely on the basis of whether or not Chairman Mao remained. He still couldn't forget 1936, when the Red Army withdrew from the counties of Hsia and Wubow, and the Kuomintang combined with the local landlords and gentry in a massacre of the people. Shih Defu was only twelve or thirteen at the time; he didn't know much. But every hair on Shih Yungkung's head had stood on end. Now Shih Yungkung's fervent wish was that Chairman Mao would not leave, and that this would also provide a measure of safety for the people and the local cadres. . . .

At noon, the three men went down to the district office for lunch. They found district clerk Shang concluding a meeting with the *hsiang** chief, the *hsiang* Party secretary, and the cadres of the villages; Carpenter, the administration clerk and Orchid, the leader of the women's association, represented Shajya Village. Although most of the men were away at the front, caches had been prepared when Hu Tsung-nan had attacked Yen-an; when the enemy occupied Sweideh things potentially

* An administrative unit composed of several villages.

useful to the invaders were concealed. Now it was up to the village cadres to lead the populace in hiding the supplies again. The knotty problem was to arrange caves and pits in which the old folks, the women and the children could take shelter. The rainy season was approaching, and it was feared that the mountain freshets would flood the pits. Finally it was decided that in an emergency villagers from level regions should crowd into the caves of the villages in mountainous sections. Shajya Village and another village were directed to clean the caves and repair the paths leading to them. . . .

The meeting over, Orchid hurried off to call together Phoenix and the other more active women. Carpenter explained to Shih Defu and Shih Yungkung what had just transpired.

"This afternoon, Orchid and I will go with a number of people to straighten up our village's cliff caves," he said. "How did you get along at the grain station this morning? I'm afraid for the time being I won't be able to help you. . . ."

"There haven't been many deliveries today," replied Shih Defu. "We don't need you yet. You keep working on your battle preparations!"

Some of the cadres from the neighboring villages were not too enthusiastic about repairing the caves. These hide-outs were prepared during the Mohammedan Revolt in the Manchu dynasty. The paths leading to them, twisting like a sheep's intestine, had long since been washed out and were overgrown with wild date trees and brambles. The caves themselves were weakened by the burrowing of rabbits and squirrels; pheasants and ravens had littered the interiors with their droppings. No doubt the caves were a terrible mess. It would hardly be worth the trouble, they said. When the enemy came, why not simply hide in some ravines until they had gone?

But others were opposed to this careless method. Better to expend a little effort and be safe, they insisted. The people who needed concealment were old folks, women and children. If the situation should suddenly change, where could they find suitable hiding places in a hurry?

Shih Defu reminded them that consideration had to be given to the families of army men and civilian grain porters. "Those men who are at the front have gone there for the sake of all of us," he said. "The way I see it, we cadres ought to treat their old people and children like our own. Our superiors have told us to prepare the caves. We shouldn't refuse the job, no matter how much trouble it involves. Suppose something should happen to some of those families as a result of our neglect? When their men come back from the front, how could we cadres — safe at home — how could we explain?"

The men nodded at this. "That's right!" they said. "We ought to carry out our orders. That's the least we can do, with the government moving our rear line organizations and families to the Yellow River. . . ."

"A stitch in time saves nine. . . ."

The cadres were about to return to their respective villages, when a mass of people came pouring into the compound, with three men from Kungjya Gully at their head. The first of them, a peasant, was dragging the second, Huai, the landlord, by the front of his white shirt. Behind Huai was the third man — also a peasant — carrying a pipe in one hand. His other hand was clenched in a fist as big as a sledge-hammer, which he seemed to be holding in readiness to smash the landlord's head like a melon if he should try to run away. They approached the entrance to the district office cave, with most of the population of Shajya Village crowding behind them and others still coming. Huai had been thoroughly hated in the old society and he was called openly by the name that had been whispered with a curse before liberation — "Stinker."

"Has he gone bad again?" shouted a voice from the crowd. "Why don't you tie him up?"

"We would have done it long ago if we had a rope," grated the peasant with the big fist.

They hauled the landlord on to the level elevation in front of the cave, then the first peasant released Huai's shirt.

"What's wrong?" asked Shang, the district clerk.

"Make him speak!" said the first peasant. He glared angrily at the landlord. "What was the rumor you told Chengwa's mother? Tell us!"

The color drained from Huai's face. He stole a glance at the people filling the courtyard and stammered, "Just a chance remark. . . ."

"A chance remark?" the big-fisted peasant lumbered forward to demand. "Then what are you afraid of? Speak up!"

But the shameless rogue wouldn't utter a syllable.

Standing under the glaring midday sun, the people in the courtyard were perspiring freely. Very few of the villagers had brought their straw hats because at the sound of the shouting they had rushed out to investigate. Shih Yungkung suggested that they return home for lunch and let the cadres take the landlord into the cave for questioning. With a great roar, the crowd responded that they didn't mind the sun, and the clear high voices of Orchid and Phoenix could be heard yelling for Huai to "Confess!" Shih Yungkung hastily turned to Shang, the *hsiang* chief and the *hsiang* Party secretary.

"You can't get any ivory from the mouth of a pig. Why should we let him spread the rumor he told to Chengwa's mother among the people here? After questioning him, tie him up and send him to the district security assistant in Second *Hsiang*," he suggested.

Shang and the *hsiang* leaders looked at one another. They didn't know what rumors Stinker had been spreading, and Shih Yungkung's method sounded safe enough. But Shih Defu didn't think much of that idea. The moment he had seen the landlord being pulled into the courtyard, the rage within him burst into flame. His eyes, gleaming with hatred, never left the landlord's ashen face. He sent Old Wang, the cook,

for a rope, then pushed his way to the leading cadres. He suggested that the rumor should be exposed to the people.

"Hu Tsung-nan's hundreds of thousands of men don't scare us," the militiaman said loudly. "Is this dog's rumor going to do it?"

"No!" yelled the crowd, and Orchid called out, "Let's hear what sort of thing he's been farting!"

The *hsiang* leader, the *hsiang* Party secretary and Shang agreed with Shih Defu's proposal. Since the people had all turned out, it wouldn't be good to let them go home without knowing the cause of the commotion. Shang asked the two men from Kungjya Gully to explain. After a brief argument between them, the one who had dragged Stinker by the shirt was allowed to make the report.

When the landlord had learned that the Field Army had not taken Yulin, said the peasant, that Hu Tsung-nan's army was coming up from the south, that the personnel and families of government rear line organizations were moving toward the Yellow River, and that various government units and the people were beginning to leave Chenchuan, his satisfaction exceeded all bounds. He lost the hang-dog expression he had assumed in January when the peasants had settled their accounts with him. Grinning, his head high, he went swaggering about the village. After the village and *hsiang* cadres left to attend the preparation for battle meeting in the district, the landlord had approached the mother of Chengwa, a youngster serving at the front with the civilian service units. He said that the government was in a panic. He was afraid that the Field Army had been defeated at Yulin, that it couldn't stand up under the fire of the enemy's reinforcements and would probably cross the Yellow River into Shansi. . . .

"I said 'afraid,' didn't I?" the landlord interposed craftily. "I too am afraid something like that might happen. . . ."

The rest of his words were drowned out by a great hoot of derision from the crowd. The people knew from the very fact that Secretary Jin and co-op manager Feng had gone to Cedar Rise to organize grain supplies that the Field Army was not preparing to cross the river. In the hubbub that followed the landlord's statement, many voices were heard saying that Stinker wasn't "afraid," he was "hoping." The ham-fisted peasant angrily grabbed him.

"You're afraid?" he demanded. "Tell me, did you or did you not say, 'The moth tries to extinguish the oil lamp, but the flame kills it?'"

"I never said it. It's all something Chengwa's mother made up. . . ."

"So you never said it to her! You were strutting around the village, so happy you were talking to yourself! You were crazy with joy. Didn't you see me there at the foot of the slope? I ask you: Didn't you sneer to my brother and say, 'Sweep the cave and courtyard clean. Chairman Mao will be coming this way soon!?' What did you mean by that? You're celebrating too early! Do you think we can't fix you right now?"

Stinker lowered his eyes and attempted to look pathetic with such transparent hypocrisy that the men wanted to beat him, and the women spat at him.

"Naturally he hopes the Field Army will leave for Shansi," cried the peasants. "We divided his caves and divided his land. If Hu Tsung-nan comes, he can get them back!"

"You're dreaming!" Phoenix shouted at the landlord. "Hu Tsung-nan is the moth. Watch the way we burn him to a crisp!"

"What else did he say?" Shang asked the two men from Kungjya Gully.

"Isn't that poisonous enough?" said the man who had been giving the report. "Everyone knows Chengwa's mother is chicken-hearted. She's been a widow since she was twenty-five and her whole life has been her boy. She never thought about whether Stinker's lie was believable or not, she only worried that her son, as a supply service worker, would go with the Field Army into Shansi. Always sighing, burning incense in the temple, she had our whole village upset; but no one knew what was wrong with her. Later, after a lot of questioning, we finally found out it was his work!" Furious, the man gave Stinker a resounding slap on the face.

The whole courtyard rang with cries to hit him again, harder, to tie him up. Old Wang, trying to force his way through the crowd, called to Shih Defu and threw him a rope over the heads of the people. Carpenter, Pa Hu, the two men from Kungjya Gully and many others pushed forward to help the militiaman. Shih Yungkung too grabbed the rope. He had been afraid Stinker's rumor was that Chairman Mao was leaving, but he hadn't thought the landlord would be so insane as to claim the Field Army wanted to cross the Yellow River! The *hsiang* Party secretary stopped the enraged men.

"Not so fast. Let me explain clearly to everybody first." He then urged the people not to be like Chengwa's mother and be taken in by rumors. The Field Army has not been defeated, he said. Not only is it not going to cross the river, but it has everything ready to wipe out the enemy which it is deliberately letting advance. Although the civilian service workers would remain with the Army, he guaranteed that the village cadres would take care of all the families whose menfolk were away at the front.

"We made all our plans this morning and we'll get them going this afternoon," he concluded.

The crowd roared its approval. In the rearmost ranks, Phoenix's father was smiling and shouting to Old Chen how ridiculous Chengwa's mother was for having taken the word of a landlord. . . .

Twisting the rope in his hands, Shih Defu addressed the people. He requested that in the future if they caught any more rumor-mongers, they should bring them to the district too. "If our Field Army were going to withdraw across the Yellow River, wouldn't we get rid of the

grain now filling the three caves of our station?" he reasoned. "Would we keep it for that bastard Hu Tsung-nan?"

"Right!" bellowed Carpenter. This was his chance to bring home a point to the local people for whom he was responsible as Shajya Village administration clerk. "Just keep your eye on our grain station. Only if our superiors give orders for us to give out the grain among you for safe-keeping should things be considered really tight. You can rely on what I'm telling you. . . ."

Many of the peasants were not listening to him. They were watching Shih Defu uncoil the rope.

"Turn around," the militiaman ordered the landlord who had been his master a few years before. "Put your hands behind your back." And as he bound the prisoner's arms, he demanded, "Are you going to the county to complain about me again this time?"

The courtyard rang with the peasants' laughter. A year and a half ago, in March 1946, Shih Defu had also tied up the landlord. The ill-fated truce had just been made with the KMT, and Huai-tsung returned late one night from the as yet unliberated town of Chenchuan. Shih Defu, afraid that KMT agents might take advantage of the peace atmosphere to slip in and create troubles, was patrolling with two other militiamen. He ran into him. Stinker refused to submit to a search of his person. Moreover, he announced haughtily, "You Communist military are all going to be reorganized into the Generalissimo's forces and both sides must act in a democratic manner. I have the right to come and go as I please. You have no right to search me."

This speech had brought sparks from Shih Defu's eyes. Stinker was an open member of the KMT and had always been hostile to everything in the Border Area. Now he had the gall to act high and mighty. But Shih Defu couldn't out-talk him, and since Huai-tsung wouldn't be searched, the militiaman asked that he go with them to the district office for questioning. Stinker said he wanted to get some sleep; he'd go the following day. Shih Defu lost his patience. He was sure the landlord was carrying spy material. Afraid that if he let him go home, Stinker would hide it, Shih Defu tied him up and searched him. He found a book on the landlord's person, but when they took him to the district office and looked at the book in the light, it turned out to be only an ordinary novel. Stinker raised a big fuss about this "outrage" and the next day lodged a complaint against Shih Defu with the county government. He wanted to know whether the Border Area militia had been ordered to arrest people without cause. . . .

"Are you going to the county about me again?" queried Shih Defu as he tightened the knots. "Has your 'Generalissimo' reorganized our forces yet? You think that your papa Hu Tsung-nan is coming and you can play the big shot again? If you still want to swill down a few more years' food, you'd better be careful what you say and do!"

Stinker blinked rapidly. He seemed to be concocting some scheme. The crowd shouted for Shih Defu to tie him tighter.

"He won't get loose," said Shih Defu. He pulled the knots with all his strength, then asked district clerk Shang, "When shall we send him over?"

"Our superiors have told us time and again that neither the *hsiangs* nor the districts should hold prisoners," Shih Yungkung reminded them. "The earlier we get him to the security section of the county government the better."

The two men from Kungjya Gully promptly volunteered to take him. At such a critical time, they said, no good could come of letting his type run around loose. In fact if the authorities hadn't prevented it, when the accounts were settled in January, the masses would have trampled him to death!

After a moment's thought, Shang said, "Our district chief and security assistant have just gone into the countryside to handle the battle preparation work. They have no time to settle this even if we send him to them. I think we should hold him temporarily here in the district office while we send them a letter asking for instructions. This is war time. We won't be wrong to hold him over."

"That's right," the *hsiang* chief and the *hsiang* Party secretary agreed. "It's better than shifting him up and back and giving him a chance to escape."

"There are two other dogs in Kungjya Gully who have to be watched!" Shih Defu reminded them. He was referring to two of Stinker's relatives.

The man who had brought the landlord said that after the affair of Chengwa's mother was discovered, the two relatives had been compelled to find a guarantor who gave security to the chief of the anti-traitors team that they would not run away nor spread rumors, that they would work with the masses in preparing for battle. . . .

Stinker was locked in the cave which sometimes served as the district jail, and the people then left the courtyard. The *hsiang* and village cadres hurried back to their battle preparation work. Shang wrote a letter to be dispatched to district chief Tsow and district security assistant who were in Second *Hsiang*. After drinking their noon-day soup, Shih Defu and the grain station cadres returned to their posts.

The atmosphere was charged, like the tension before a gathering storm. While two of the districts within the administrative region were distributing among their peasants the grain from the Gowjya bins, High Temple and Shajya Village districts continued the preparation for war. All afternoon, not one person delivered grain to the station at Shajya Village. Toward sunset, when there was little danger of enemy planes, the Field Army's rear line organizations, stationed in the district of Shajya Village, began moving north. Although from the direction they were taking they didn't seem to be heading for the Yellow River, at least

they were going to a place of greater safety. One of the comrades passing through Shajya Village with the organization personnel told Shih Defu the enemy had not yet reached Sweideh in the south, but that the personnel had been ordered to circle around to the rear of our forces coming down from Yulin. The enemy must be pressing close in the south, Shih Defu thought. . . .

Carpenter, Orchid and Phoenix mobilized the entire village's men, women and children and took them to clean out the cliff caves to be used as hiding places. While the others were hard at work, Shih Defu, Shih Yungkung and Pa Hu sat idle in the grain station. It was the kind of idleness that got on one's nerves, for they were confronted with three caves full of grain. Since no grain was being delivered and no one was calling for grain, Shih Yungkung wanted to send a letter to Commissioner Geh in Chenchuan reporting the situation and asking for instructions. Shih Defu thought that wasn't necessary yet. Their superiors had told them to wait for word. What was the use of being panicky?

Old Chen was concerned about the grain section and he came running over from the cooperative. Shih Defu told him not to worry about the fodder section. Wheat stalks and hay made a big pile but didn't cost much. He said the old man should dispose of the co-op merchandise first because when orders did come to wind up the grain station, they would probably have to invite him to lend a hand.

In the meanwhile, Shih Defu and Pa Hu helped Shih Yungkung straighten out the station accounts. At sunset they went down to the district office for their evening meal. The others had already returned from the cliff hide-outs.

As the grain station men entered the compound, Carpenter and Old Wang, the cook, shouted to them from the door of the district office.

"Would you say that Stinker is human?"

"What?" The men were surprised. "What harm can he do locked up?"

"We ought to give that kind of scum an early start to meet the king of hell!" Old Wang glared balefully at the privy in the corner of the compound. The others followed his look. There was a lock on the door. Stinker was now being detained in the privy.

The district had no regular jail, and the cave in which occasional prisoners were kept was actually a small storeroom. For several years prisoners, some bound, some unbound, had been held in that cave, and nothing ever went wrong. Who would have thought that Stinker, locked up only for an afternoon, could do so much damage? When Old Wang had gone in to get rice for the evening meal, his first scoop brought up a large chunk of stool! Hastily, he looked in the flour container. Stinker had urinated in it! . . .

"That son of a bitch!" raged Shih Defu. "What a swine! The last time the enemy was in Sweideh, didn't Hu Tsung-nan's men spill the peasants' rice and flour all over the ground and piss in their vinegar and

soya oil vats? This son of a bitch is made from the same mould as Hu's bastards!"

Pa Hu clenched his fist. He wanted to give Stinker a beating, but Shih Yungkung restrained him.

"If you do, when we have to send him on he'll pretend he can't walk, and we don't have the people to carry him. . . ."

"Hasn't the messenger come back yet?" asked Shih Defu. "Why aren't we shipping Stinker to the district chief?"

"The messenger's back," said Old Wang in a low voice. "District chief Tsow sent a letter saying to hold him here a couple of days because prisoners held by the security section have already been moved elsewhere. As soon as he has the guerillas organized, he'll send someone to fetch him."

"What about district clerk Shang?"

"Secretary Jin sent a message too. He says they're too busy right now. He sent Shang to work in Fifth *Hsiang*, but he can start back tomorrow morning. . . ."

Shih Defu told Old Wang in a whisper to be careful that Stinker didn't run away. Then they all had dinner. It was dark by the time they finished.

Influenced by the departure of the Field Army's rear line organizations, when night fell every family set to work hiding things which might be useful to the enemy. Courtyards were illuminated by lanterns and torches casting fitful shadows. The accounts of the grain station having been cleared, there was nothing further for Shih Defu and the others to do that night. They prepared to go home to conceal their own families' articles.

"We'd better sleep a little less tonight," said Shih Defu. "After we fix things up at home, we ought to help the short-handed families of army men and civilian workers at the front. Uncle Carpenter, what have you arranged with Orchid and the women?"

Carpenter told him the names of the six families who still needed assistance. The men agreed to help two families each, then separated to return to their homes.

As Shih Defu strode through the silent gorge, he thought to himself: Tomorrow's the day the enemy has set to reach Sweideh. It's a flat run from there to Chenchuan. But we still didn't hear any artillery today. Does that mean that Hu's Thirty-sixth Division wants to wait till his main forces on the southern front move up before they strike at Chenchuan from the north? What is our Field Army's plan anyhow? . . .

The moving out of the rear line organizations and the fact that Secretary Jin and his group were so rushed made him suspect that the Field Army would really come south quickly. . . .

"Defu."

Phoenix was calling to him from Orchid's courtyard gate. "Wait a minute. I want to ask you something."

Shih Defu turned. "What is it? Are you afraid?"

"Afraid of what?" Phoenix's voice had its usual firm tone, though she spoke hurriedly. She looked to see that there was no one around, then came close to him. "What did you say to Secretary Jin?" she asked with an effort. "I came back with him from Fourth *Hsiang* yesterday. On the road, he said I . . ."

"What about you?"

"He said I — he said I — Anyhow he didn't say I was bad. He said I should do my work well. . . ."

"Then take his advice," Shih Defu said. He was trying to put his affair with Phoenix out of his mind for a while. There was a fierce struggle ahead in which he would have to prove himself. . . .

"People are worried," she said hesitantly. "They're afraid you can't handle the grain station. But you must —"

"I know. I can only do my best. You go on back. Don't you have to help the neighbors hide their stuff tonight?"

Phoenix smiled happily in the dark. She squeezed his hand and said, "Orchid has told me to help two families. . . ." She released him and walked back to the compound. She looked around as she reached the gate, but Shih Defu had already crossed the ridge and was descending the slope on the other side.

IX

After a period of busy activity which lasted half the night, the lamps of Shajya Village gradually were extinguished. By the time the early risers left their beds the following morning, the cave home of every family was prepared. Grain, clothing, spinning-wheels, looms, farm tools — all were hidden away. Only essential cooking utensils remained for the preparation of dry rations, after which the people would be ready to pick up and leave at any time. Then came the surprising news which startled the entire village.

Stinker had escaped. . . .

"But how could he get away?" everyone wanted to know.

The privy in which Stinker had been locked had been built by a landlord with some idea of sanitation. Back against the wall of the compound, the privy contained a sloping chute which led to a deep pit on the outside of the wall. A large flat stone with an opening a foot square formed the seat. Stinker, after fraying open on the edge of the stone the rope which bound his hands, removed the seat and slid down the chute into the twenty-five-foot deep pit. Luckily for him, the accumulated excrement was no higher than his waist, and he clambered out and ran. In the morning, when Old Wang, the cook, looked into the privy and saw the removed stone seat and the pieces of rope, he was frantic. He rushed all around the village, shouting for the cadres.

A crowd quickly gathered before the pit. Stinker's plunge had splashed its contents all over the place. A trail of filth marked the direction in which he had run — not through the village, but over the hill to the south.

"What shall we do?" Old Wang was very upset. "The district has no regular jail. When we locked him in the storage cave, he made a mess of it. Who would have thought that he could lift a hundred pound stone and risk drowning in the offal pit?"

Old Chen shook his head. "Incredible! I'd never have believed a landlord could be so base!"

"There's nothing incredible about it!" Shih Defu's eyes flashed with anger. "The landlord is our enemy to the death. He'll do anything. We weren't careful enough. Old Wang, don't take it too hard. It's not your fault alone, we all should have thought of the chute. . . ."

A general discussion followed. The peasants agreed that Stinker probably would not dare return to his home in Kungjya Gully to change his clothes nor would he try to reach Hu Tsung-nan's forces, still a long way off. Most likely he was hiding somewhere where he could await the arrival of the enemy. Someone recalled that Stinker's uncle lived in Chenchuan, where the situation was complicated. The uncle was a landlord whose accounts had been settled by the peasants last spring. That sounded like the logical place for Stinker to go under cover. . . .

"Right!" Shih Defu cried. "Uncle Carpenter, you go to Kungjya Gully and make contact with the *hsiang* government. Pa Hu, we two will see where this trail leads." With the latter, the militiaman pursued the course of the malodorous footprints up the southern hill.

Bemoaning the unfortunate escape, the crowd broke up. By then, the whole village was aroused and talking about the event.

At breakfast time, having finished his battle preparation work in the Fifth *Hsiang*, district clerk Shang returned to Shajya Village. When he learned what had happened, he was so angry he couldn't speak for several minutes. Probing into the causes, it seemed to him that none of the cadres were blameless. Stinker was different from the usual run of law-breakers, said Shang. He should never have been held in the storage cave in the first place. To lock him in the privy after he had befouled the rice and flour was a bad case of snap judgment.

"But since you put him in the privy," he asked Old Wang, "why didn't you watch him during the night?"

"I was careful, like Shih Defu told me," said Old Wang distractedly. "I looked in on him a couple of times before midnight. But later I was so worn out, I slept like the dead. . . ."

"What were the rest of you doing?" Shang demanded of Shih Yungkung.

Shih Yungkung told him how they had mobilized the entire village to conceal articles useful to the enemy. "If we had ever imagined that something like this might happen," he said painfully, "Pa Hu and I

would have found time somehow to stay in the district office and take turns to watch him!"

"What about Shih Defu? He tells other people to be careful; where was he? I suppose he was off with Phoenix—"

"No," interrupted Shih Yungkung. "Defu has been obeying the district chief about that since he's come back. He didn't see her last night. The truth is the truth. You shouldn't wrong the boy."

"Good clerk Shang," Old Wang said unhappily, "you have no reason to blame Defu. He was up all night helping everyone hide their things. Blame me. Even though I was dead tired I had no right to sleep. Ai!" He hit his head with his fist, fiercely. "And the people have been paying me wages out of their hard-earned money! I deserve to die!"

Shih Defu and Pa Hu followed Stinker's trail over the south hill to the small river leading to Kungjya Gully. There, the landlord had washed himself and his clothes. Then he had continued over hills and through gorges, working his way west. They dropped the trail when it reached the borders of Chenchuan county. Sure that he had gone into the city, they went back to the *hsiang* government office at Kungjya Gully. The leader of the *hsiang* anti-traitors team and a militiaman, eating breakfast, were about to go back to the district office with Carpenter for a letter of introduction to the Chenchuan authorities. They would ask permission to search the house of Stinker's uncle. Shih Defu and Pa Hu smoked their pipes until the men finished eating, then all four came to the district office together.

Shih Yungkung sighed as Shih Defu concluded his recital. "Ai! Stinker has got away. He'll be a big trouble-maker when the enemy comes! He's sure to —"

"Regrets are no use!" Shih Defu cut in. "Naturally it's no good that he's escaped. But even if we don't catch him it won't be so terrible! He and those sons of bitches Chiang Kai-shek and Hu Tsung-nan sooner or later are all going to meet the same fate. We'll wipe out the enemy just the same! Clerk Shang, please hurry with that letter and let these men get started."

Shang had been intending to criticize Shih Defu, but when he saw how hard he was working, and observed his eyes, bloodshot from lack of sleep, he changed his mind. In a bad humor, he took up his writing brush, and the others stood quietly until he finished. Shih Defu escorted the two men from Kungjya Gully to the outskirts of the village, where he told them what things to watch for. By the time he got back, Shang had finished another letter, reporting the escape of Stinker. The district clerk directed Carpenter to have it delivered to district chief Tsow. . . .

As a result of the turmoil caused by this turn of events, it was nearly ten o'clock before the villagers were able to complete their morning meal. Then every family in Shajya Village set to work preparing dry rations. The village was pervaded with the odor of roasted wheat kernels and wheat cakes. No one came to the grain station; an oppressive silence

hung over everything. For two days now grain porters had stopped coming to Shajya Village, and enemy planes seldom appeared. Judging from the distant roar of bombing and strafing, the people and material moving toward the Yellow River had become the new target of the enemy planes.

August 15th. This was the day on which two armies of Hu Tsung-nan, driving from the south and west, had fixed for their juncture at Sweideh. In mid-morning, an unprecedentedly intense concentration of high explosives could be heard booming in the distance. The people at first assumed it was an artillery barrage of our Field Army against Hu Tsung-nan's 36th Division to the north; but then they realized that the sound was coming from the east and northeast—a continuous sound, now further, now nearer. Obviously the enemy was using the planes and the bombs which America had sent them to blockade the fording places on the Yellow River and to bomb our boats.

Why was it that our Field Army still hadn't attacked the 36th? In the hearts of the villagers, worry began to edge out their anxiety to recapture Stinker.

Since there was nothing to be done at the grain station, Shih Defu napped in the cave of the district Party committee. A short while later, Pa Hu joined him in slumber. Shih Yungkung thought it remarkable that they should be able to sleep under such circumstances. Having recently returned from the front, perhaps they didn't mind the noise of battle, but the eight tons of grain piled up in the station—that was nothing to be sneezed at! Muttering to himself, "How will the fighting really turn out?" Shih Yungkung walked from the district office to the grain station, from the grain station to the district office. Shortly before noon, the news Shih Yungkung had been dreading most finally was transmitted to Shajya Village. Orchid, Phoenix and a few other women had rushed into the district office to report it. When he heard what they had to say, Shih Yungkung was convinced that matters had taken a serious turn for the worse, and he hastily roused Shih Defu and Pa Hu.

Shih Defu sat up. His lids still heavy with sleep, he saw the women gathered beside him. They seemed quite upset.

"What's the matter?" Shih Defu rubbed his eyes.

Shih Yungkung answered solemnly, "They've heard that Chairman Mao is going toward the Yellow River!"

"I don't believe it!" Shih Defu jumped to his feet. "Whose wild stories have you been listening to now?"

"Women like to believe silly gossip," Pa Hu said lazily, his eyes still half closed. He rolled over and went back to sleep.

All talking at once, the women began to relate how they had heard this news. Shih Yungkung told them to be quiet. Let Orchid speak for them.

"You few men are responsible for such a large amount of grain, Defu, it's not good always to be so casual about things," said Orchid. "The

mother and sister of one of our women just came here from their village near Michih. Someone saw Chairman Mao on the Sweideh-Michih road yesterday afternoon, and south of Michih he was turning off to go east. The people there thought it odd. If he were going to meet our forces, why didn't he go north through Michih?"

"That's right!" said Shih Yungkung in a voice that trembled. His face was white. "Aiya, if Chairman Mao is leaving, things must be very bad. . . ."

"You say the mother comes from near the city?" asked Shih Defu. "How do you know whether she's honest?"

"Right!" Pa Hu had gotten up again as Orchid was speaking. He asked distrustfully, "Why should they run more than fifty *li* from their home? Bring her in here for questioning!"

"She's a poor peasant just like us," Phoenix hastily explained. "Her son is a squad leader in the militia. He sent her and his sister here so that he wouldn't have to worry about them while he was fighting the enemy. . . ."

"Don't be so suspicious," said Orchid. "This isn't like Stinker's case. The old lady warned her daughter not to repeat this, but she called us together and told us, privately."

"Who saw him?" queried Shih Defu. "They shouldn't say just anyone is Chairman Mao!"

"You're impossible!" said Orchid. "What village doesn't have a picture of Chairman Mao? Who wouldn't recognize him? The old lady says somebody saw him. He was riding an iron-grey horse; his face was all smiles and he had an easy manner. . . ."

"Perhaps it's true then," said Pa Hu, looking at Shih Defu.

Shang, Old Chen and Carpenter, having already questioned the old woman about conditions in her region, had come in and listened during the discussion. Shih Defu asked them what they thought about this story.

"It's true," affirmed Carpenter, an "old Yen-an man." "Her description fits him all right. There were many other mounted men with him. In all the years I was in Yen-an, there were never so many big leaders together except in Yangjya Ridge." He sighed deeply. "Cross the Yellow River quickly," he prayed. "Then we can rest easy about you."

Old Chen clucked his tongue sorrowfully. "He started a little late. The enemy occupied Sweideh today and he left that neighborhood only yesterday afternoon. He's too close to them. Suppose they find out and chase after him?"

"We'd never let them catch him," said Shang. Something else was troubling him. "If the boats at the ferrying points have been bombed to bits, what will happen? Can it be that Chairman Mao hasn't foreseen it? If he wants to cross the Yellow River, why didn't he leave a few days ago when it was easy? The enemy action began some time ago. It

wasn't that he didn't know. Why did he wait till the enemy has come so close before he left?"

Shih Defu could see that Shang didn't entirely believe this story of Chairman Mao's departure either. "There's still another thing," Shih Defu added. "Chairman Mao is only a few dozen *li* from the enemy. Why would he set out in broad daylight?"

"Sure!" agreed Shang. "When he was seen south of Michih, the sun hadn't set yet. Probably he didn't start till late afternoon when the enemy planes stop coming. . . ."

Shih Defu thought a moment, then said with conviction, "Chairman Mao definitely doesn't intend to cross the river! He has some kind of a plan. If you don't believe it, wait and see! What was it that Feng said the other night when he came back from Chenchuan? — One tiny plan by Chairman Mao can beat one hundred thousand soldiers of Chiang Kai-shek!"

Shang and Old Chen nodded. The women had gradually lost their disturbed expressions during this conversation. They looked affectionately at the large picture of Chairman Mao hanging on the wall. His expression, so impressive, so noble, seemed to say: "I shall not leave northern Shensi. I shall be with you in a firm, determined struggle and we will wipe out the invading bandits of Chiang and Hu!"

Phoenix turned to look at Shih Defu, who was calmly filling his short-stemmed pipe. His steadiness delighted her. She admired his good sense. She loved him more than ever since he returned from the front. . . .

Pa Hu and Carpenter were concerned over what plan Chairman Mao could have, with tens of thousands of the enemy drawing near. Shih Yungkung raised his head and stared at the leader's picture.

"Chairman! You're no ordinary person. You mustn't make a mistake!"

"Don't worry on his account," said Shih Defu. "He certainly isn't an ordinary man, or he wouldn't have that spirit! He can't do anything that doesn't succeed. What we have to worry about is our work. It's peculiar that there still hasn't been any activity on the northern front. Hasn't the Field Army caught the 36th Division yet?"

Someone said that either the Division had remained in Yulin to hold the town, or, fearing the strength of our Field Army, it had withdrawn into it. In either case, said others, if our Army can't come to grips with the 36th, why is it still hanging around up north? Who is going to protect Chenchuan if Tung Chao and Liu Kan's forces come swarming up from the south?

"I think our Field Army has decided to wipe out the 36th Division. They're just waiting for their chance," ventured Shang. "When the men we sent into Chenchuan after Stinker come back, we should have some news. . . ."

"They'll be here before evening," said Shih Defu, "so let's all keep calm."

The gathering broke up.

* * *

The report which the old lady brought of the tense atmosphere south of Michih, plus the unsettling silence on the northern front, had a disquieting effect on the Shajya villagers. That afternoon, several of the women who were pregnant or who had recently given birth and were unable to travel quickly because of their condition, expressed fears that hiding in the prepared cliff caves would be troublesome and possibly dangerous. All those who had relatives in the northern villages or in the Gumu district of Hsia county, began to move out of Shajya Village.

There was also a more direct reason for this exodus. Orchid's prospective in-laws in the Gumu district sent a young nephew to fetch her and her family to their village. The boy said that the rear line organizations of the Field Army had set up there, and that from today onward all their grain was to be delivered to Cedar Rise section. Secretary Jin and the others were hard at work organizing the grain delivery system. This meant that the Field Army had not succeeded in its plan to wipe out the 36th Division and that it probably would be coming south. . . .

But as leader of the women in Shajya Village, Orchid could hardly think only of herself and be the first to run. She refused to leave. Naturally, her mother also insisted on remaining. They told the nephew that if it became necessary they would find their way to the in-laws' village themselves. After discussing the situation with Carpenter, Orchid mobilized Phoenix and the other women of the association. To anticipate any eventuality, they worked all afternoon urging those women who had recently given birth or who were in advanced pregnancy to move to villages north of the highway, even if they had no relatives there.

Shih Yungkung's wife had born a child a little more than a month before, and the wife of Pa Hu was in her seventh month. Both of their mothers lived in the northern villages. The wives wanted to go, but because their husbands were working in the grain station there was no one to escort them. Orchid and Phoenix asked Carpenter to talk to Shih Defu about this problem.

The grain station was idle, and Shih Defu and his two helpers were rechecking the grain when Carpenter called him out. Shih Defu thought they should refer the matter to Shang. Together they sought the district clerk.

"You know that Shih Yungkung and his wife have a flock of kids and he's always worried about them," said Shih Defu. "We ought to let him and Pa Hu send their families to a place of safety, to save any trouble in the future. . . ."

"Suppose people suddenly come for grain from Chenchuan or Wulungpu, then what?" said Shang. "You don't want to listen to Shih Yungkung's complaints."

"Yungkung is busy with his accounts. He hasn't had time to think about this," Shih Defu explained. "Orchid told Uncle Carpenter to ask me about it. You know my own affairs are simple enough. In time of emergency, if their families are here, my words won't carry weight no matter how I advise them not to bother about them. If grain should have to be shipped, Old Chen, Jang and Uncle Carpenter can help. Besides, there's you and Old Wang. . . ."

Shih Defu was insistent, and Shang was forced to agree. "All right, let them go then and come right back!"

Returning to the grain station, Shih Defu told Shih Yungkung and Pa Hu to set out at once. Shih Yungkung promptly turned over his account books to Shih Defu, took up his pipe and hurried through the door. Pa Hu maintained the unfurried air he had acquired in the army.

"What's all the excitement?" he drawled. "Who would escort her if I hadn't been discharged from the army? When the enemy gets close, she can go herself. I'll take care of the grain station here with you."

Shih Yungkung would still have his mother to take care of the house for him after he sent off his wife and children, but he, said Pa Hu, had only his wife. Besides, although they were poor, someone had to look after their little merchandise stand.

Courage and carelessness were two different things, explained Shih Defu. He wasn't excited, he was only getting ready against the time when there would be a rush of work. He urged Pa Hu to go home and help his wife pack. They could lock the door of their house and leave.

"Since you have been discharged, you can't neglect her," said Shih Defu. "She's seven months pregnant. Hurry up!" He dragged Pa Hu to his feet. Only then did the ex-soldier knock the ashes out of his pipe and depart.

All afternoon, whether from Wulungpu or from Chenchuan, not a single person came for grain.

At dusk, a letter arrived from the *hsiang* government at Kungjya Gully. Stinker could not be found. His uncle and other suspicious characters had been arrested in Chenchuan by the county government and moved to the Wujwang district. Only their wives and children were permitted to remain at home. The letter also stated that Hu Tsung-nan's 36th Division was moving south along the west bank of the Wuding River, and that its advance units had reached the salt flats, fifteen *li* from Chenchuan. If the enemy didn't ford the river during the night, it would cross the following morning to occupy the city.

The situation was rapidly becoming worse than anyone had expected. . . .

X

When the roosters crowed for the second time the following morning, Shih Defu, with two hand grenades in his pocket, was preparing to leave for Chenchuan. There was still no order from Commissioner Geh about disposition of the grain station, but from the west again came the muffled booming of artillery, Shih Defu decided he simply had to go and see for himself what was happening.

"Sound out the situation as you go along the road. Don't plunge ahead blindly," Shih Yungkung urged him. "If our government left Chenchuan during the night, you're liable to run into trouble if you go barging in. . . ."

"If you'd listen to me, we two would go together!" said Pa Hu. He also held two hand grenades.

But Shih Defu was adamant. "Both of you wait here patiently. If porters come from Wulungpu, issue grain to them. Even if the Committee in Support of the Front has left Chenchuan, unless the enemy has captured the place, there's bound to be some of our people left. I'm not a child; don't worry about me!"

He put in his pocket the letter of identification which district clerk Shang had just finished writing to the Chenchuan Committee, and set out. Descending into the ravine, he left the village.

Shih Defu followed the gurgling stream to the gorge and then turned west. The gorge was dark in the shadow of threatening rain clouds, and strewn with stones and boulders. Picking his way carefully across the uneven ground, Shih Defu advanced toward Chenchuan — a city in the process of being abandoned, or perhaps one which was already abandoned.

Can it be that a man, in the early hours of the dawn, going to a place which may be filled with dangers, was not even a little afraid? Yes! Not in the least afraid! Shih Defu thought of the grain in the station at Shajya Village — grain produced by the year-round sweat and toil of the peasants, grain which they were sending for food to their warriors fighting the enemy, grain which he must not let fall into the enemy's hands. There was no room in his mind for fear!

He travelled quickly, and passed through several little villages where white plumes of smoke were beginning to rise from the stoves being lighted for the morning meal. He paused to wipe the perspiration from his forehead as he approached a hamlet on the edge of the flats of the Wuding River. Inquiry revealed that the local Party special committee still remained, and Shih Defu knew then that the enemy had not yet entered Chenchuan. Crops were growing lushly on the fertile flats, a light mist hung over the river — everything was the same as usual. He could see the brick-faced caves and the tile roofs of Chenchuan shining through the green foliage of trees which ringed the city. The shimmering white Hsienyang-Yulin Highway stretched straight as an arrow to Chenchuan's south gate.



SSUTU CHIAO: Sunset over Mt. Huashan

Shih Defu went along a path through the fields of crops toward the east gate. He met a few people coming toward him, carrying their belongings. They said that the enemy was still west of the Wuding River, that eighty per cent of the inhabitants had left Chenchuan during the night.

Yet when he entered the east gate, he found the town very crowded. The streets and lanes were filled with civilian grain porters, jammed with men and animals like a market day at noon. No wonder nothing had been done about the little grain station at Shajya Village. They still hadn't finished moving the grain supplies from Chenchuan!

Everyone was dirty-faced, exhausted. Men, holding their carrying poles and sitting on their empty sacks, were leaning against shop doors, snoring. Some were chewing roasted rice and wheat kernels which they carried in little bags. Donkey drivers were feeding hay to their animals. A few squatted before their beasts, and while mixing fodder into the hay with one hand, stuffed dry rations into their own mouths with the other. Winding his way through the mass of men and animals, Shih Defu looked in vain for grain carriers from Shajya Village.

Suddenly, a few dozen paces ahead of him, a comrade in a brown army uniform announced, "Attention, third company of peasant comrades. Prepare to go with me to load grain!"

At once the sleepers were awakened and the dry rations were put away. Carrying poles sprang up vertically like a forest of young saplings to block Shih Defu's path. He waited until the men counted off and departed. Then he was able to proceed.

He came to the crossroad of the city's one and only wide street, running from north to south. It too was thronged with men and donkeys. He squeezed his way through to a comrade in the coarse blue uniform of a government cadre and asked directions to the office of the Committee in Support of the Front. The comrade looked him over carefully for a moment, tested him with a few questions, then swung his arm toward the north.

"The first inn with guards in front of it!"

When he reached his destination, Shih Defu looked through the door at the large inn yard. It was empty except for Comrade Geh's big mule, already saddled and obviously ready for leaving. Hastily, Shih Defu handed his letter of identification to the guards. One of them questioned him, then told him to wait while he inquired inside.

Before long, Wujung, Comrade Geh's tall escort, came out with the guard. He was laden with equipment — carbine, Mauser pistol, knapsack and flashlight. He smiled when he saw Shih Defu and warmly shook his hand.

"The commissioner is talking to some of the army leaders. He asks if you'll wait a while." Still holding Shih Defu's hand, Wujung led him into the courtyard.

The cave and buildings were quite deserted. There was neither furniture nor people. Shih Defu couldn't understand why Commissioner Geh should remain after all the cadres had left. Wujung explained that some cadres were still in the city, helping clean out the granaries. When that job was over, they would all go to Cedar Rise.

"Don't you know that the enemy reached the salt flats yesterday afternoon? That's only fifteen *li* from here. If they weren't separated from us by the Wuding River, they'd have been here this morning."

"What the hell is going on?" demanded Shih Defu. "Doesn't the Field Army want to wipe that bunch out? Why did it let them come so far south?"

Wujung slapped his thigh in exasperation. "That son of a bitch Thirty-sixth Division is fast and slippery. We couldn't pin them down!"

Lowering his voice, he told Shih Defu what he had just heard Commissioner Geh and the army leaders saying about developments of the past few days. The facts were no longer a military secret. After the Field Army had deliberately broken its encirclement of Yulin, it immediately took up positions forty *li* south of the town to await and destroy the Thirty-sixth worn out from its forced march through the desert. Just the Fourth and Sixth Regional Militia Regiments were dispatched to the west bank of the river to cut off any enemy soldiers who might try to escape. But the wily Hu Tsung-nan's division crossed the river in full strength and, sweeping the two militia regiments before it, reached the salt flats. Only before dawn this morning were our militia regiments able to wade across to the east bank from a point lower down. Now they were guarding Chenchuan long enough to get the last of the grain removed. . . .

"So that's it!" Shih Defu said gravely. But he was not alarmed. The Thirty-sixth Division was no stranger to him. When he had been a stretcher bearer in the eastern Kansu and western Shensi campaigns, he had heard of the savageness of this enemy unit's attacks. It had been in constant pursuit of the Field Army all that time.

"If it weren't for their dodging around so, we would have had the grain out of here long ago," said Wujung. "Last night from the west bank, they lobbed mortar shells at our carriers groping through the dark down the east bank road. . . ."

Comrade Geh and three army officers came out of the cave and walked across the courtyard toward the gate. Geh was much thinner than when Shih Defu last saw him.

"Aiya!" said one of the grey-uniformed army men as he looked at the sky. "Is it going to rain?"

"A light rain won't matter," said another. "It'll keep the enemy planes away. But if it rains hard, neither we nor the enemy will be able to move."

"It's going to rain," said the third gloomily, who wore a brown uniform. "Our grain porters won't reach Shajya Village until night, at

the earliest. Commissioner Geh, can you supply us partially from some grain station that's a little nearer? From Wujwang, for instance?"

Geh clapped him on the shoulder. "I'm afraid not. Shajya Village is nearest to the front now. We've got to clean it out first. If you cadres in charge of the grain porters organize and lead them well, it won't be too late if they get there tonight. Last night I was really worried, but those peasants paid no attention to the shells the enemy was firing at them from the other side of the river. Not one of them ran away. When they get to Shajya Village they won't have to load grain the way they did here — right under the nose of the enemy. Even if it rains, once they reach there and get the grain loaded, it won't matter if the situation changes suddenly. Well goodbye. See you soon!"

Geh shook hands with each of them, then all saluted and the cadres departed. Turning around, he saw Shih Defu and Wujung approaching. He greeted the militiaman warmly, and placing a hand on his shoulder, led him into the cave office.

Shih Defu's face burned a little. After hearing Comrade Geh's remarks to the army cadres, and learning how calm the grain porters and all the cadres were, he was sorry he had not remained in Shajya Village and continued with his work till further orders.

"We don't know what's happening. I came because we're worried about the grain," he explained in embarrassment, when they entered the cave.

"I'm glad you've come." Geh did not criticize. He asked with a smile, "Did they finally decide to put you in charge of the grain station?"

"When there's no ox, a donkey must be used. There just wasn't anybody else. . . ."

Geh laughed. "The situation's all right. We planned twice to strike, but we weren't able to. We're still going to hit them! You men shouldn't get upset. We've already assigned 100 piculs of your grain to the Field Army. Their porters will probably pick it up tonight. I've written to Gwo, vice chief of the county, asking that your district Party secretary return to help you organize the grain disposition. How much do you have left?"

"About 120 piculs of millet and wheat, and a dozen or so piculs of black bean and sorghum. . . ."

"That works out fine," said Geh. "There's an army unit that wants 10 or 15 piculs this afternoon. If you have anything left over and things look bad, distribute it among the villages north of the main road for safekeeping. Do you think your men can manage all right?"

"Sure!" Shih Defu responded promptly. He hesitated a moment, then asked, "Did the enemy from the south occupy Sweideh yesterday?"

"Yes. And they've moved up another 20 or 30 li beyond it."

"Then they'll be able to join forces soon. How are we going to fight them? We heard that Chairman Mao was seen south of Michih, going east. . . ."

Geh was pleased with Shih Defu's keen interest in the military developments, and smiled approvingly. Afraid that the commissioner might misunderstand and think he was wavering, Shih Defu explained that while some people thought Chairman Mao might cross the Yellow River, he personally didn't believe it.

"What do you think?" Shih Defu looked at the commissioner's smiling face and waited for his answer.

"You're right!" was Geh's satisfied reply. "Chairman Mao will never abandon us. Things are difficult, but with Chairman Mao's leadership, we're sure to win!" Gesticulating vigorously, Geh told Shih Defu about the emergency distribution of the grain stored at Chenchuan, and recommended that the men in the village grain station should think over these experiences and learn from them.

From Geh's tone and manner it was clear to Shih Defu with what contempt the commissioner regarded the onrushing enemy. Confidently, Shih Defu took his leave. Wujung saw him to the gate of the inn yard, and Shih Defu set off in a swinging stride for Shajya Village. He was now rather looking forward to the impending battle.

Walking south down the main street, Shih Defu noticed that the crush of civilian grain porters had thinned out considerably. All the storehouses of the Chenchuan depot had distributed grain simultaneously, and with all the porters being promptly on hand to receive it, the grain had been quickly disposed of. Then, at the next intersection, he saw a great crowd of people, those in the rear standing on tip-toe and craning their necks. What's going on? he wondered. He hastened toward them. He could hear the tread of marching feet and the sound of hoof beats.

"The Fourth and Sixth Regional Militia Regiments. . . ."

"They crossed over from the west bank of the river. The horses' legs are all muddy . . ." the onlookers were saying quietly.

Shih Defu mounted the steps of a store to get a better look. The militia regiments were marching in from the west and turning south into the main street. Civilian grain porters and their pack animals were squeezed to both sides of the big main street to let the soldiers go by. The regiments had been recently formed, based on the self-defence corps of the various counties, and nearly all the militiamen came from the Sweideh Region. This chance meeting allowed many of the civilian grain porters just returned from the Yulin front to see their sons, brothers, sons-in-law. . . . All along the big south street, grain porters waved their hands, called to militiamen by name. At most they only had time to shout a word or two.

"Hushwan! Ma's better now. Don't worry. . . ."

"Hey! Mantwur, I took care of that business you wrote about. It's all right. . . ."

"Tiehju! Your wife has another little one! They're both doing fine. . . ."

And Hushwan and Mantwur and Tiehju called back, smiling, rifles gripped in their right hands, waving with their left, their feet tramping on, without stopping, without resting; the militiamen marched by without a backward glance. Many of the people standing on the sidelines watched this scene with moist eyes.

There were seven or eight men from Shajya Village in the regional militia. Shih Defu's brother Degwey was in the Fourth Regiment, and Shih Defu hoped to get a glimpse of him. In the ranks he saw a youngster from Shajya Village, a boy who had served under him in the village militia. Shih Defu called him just as he was rounding the corner. He turned his head and spotted Shih Defu. Time did not permit them to exchange more than a laugh, but how hearty and strong that laugh was!

This moving meeting of the civilian grain porters and their brother soldiers at what was now the front, following so soon after Comrade Geh's inspiring words, gave Shih Defu a new strength: "Things are difficult, but with Chairman Mao's leadership, we're sure to win!"

He recalled Geh saying that an army unit would call for 10 or 15 piculs of grain at Shajya Village in the afternoon. Geh probably was referring to these militia regiments. Shih Defu decided he could watch no longer; he couldn't wait to see his brother. He forced his way through the crowd, turned right, and soon left Chenchuan through the east gate.

Shih Defu cut directly across country. By the time he was half-way home, he could see the troops turning off the north-south highway and heading east.

* * *

Many people were waiting for Shih Defu at Shajya Village. District clerk Shang, Shih Yungkung, and Pa Hu from the grain station, Carpenter, Orchid and several others all gravitated to a height at the mouth of the ravine when they figured it was about the time for Shih Defu to be coming back. From there they could see the road running through the upper reaches of the wide gorge.

Phoenix had taken up her watch long ahead of everyone else. When the others arrived she had already been standing for some time. She did not speak to them, nor had she any desire to leave, but kept her long lashed eyes fixed steadily on the gorge road. Though her parents said that she was using her work as an excuse to be with Shih Defu constantly, that she "was becoming more and more brazen," ever since the day she had talked with the district Party secretary, Phoenix seemed to have found a sense of determination. She no longer avoided Shih Defu even in the presence of Shang and Shih Yungkung. She was seriously considering whether bringing her relationship with him cleanly into the open wouldn't be the better course. Phoenix had been the most concerned person in the village when she learned that Shih Defu had left for Chenchuan before dawn.

At about mid-morning, Shih Defu appeared, striding through the upper gorge. Carpenter, with his long legs, went bounding down to meet

him first, while the others slid and jumped in happy pursuit. Before he reached the village, Shih Defu was surrounded by a large throng demanding: "What's the situation in Chenchuan?" "Where is the enemy now?" Shih Yungkung shouted from afar, "What about our grain station?"

Shih Defu's excitement hadn't waned although he had been walking for thirty *li*. He told the villagers how the enemy had not been hit on the northern front, how orderly the civilian porters had been when moving grain at Chenchuan and how well the militia had covered them, what directions Commissioner Geh had given for the station in Shajya Village, and how the Field Army was preparing to strike the enemy Thirty-sixth Division. At this point, the villagers sighed with relief.

"As long as our Army is here, what do we care about the Thirty-sixth Division!" bellowed Carpenter. "We wouldn't give a damn about it even if it was a 'seventy-two' division!"

Shih Defu borrowed Old Wang's lined jacket to wipe the perspiration from his forehead, and Phoenix slipped her handkerchief to Orchid, who handed it to Shih Defu. The latter was still telling everyone what he had learned from Comrade Geh, waving his arms for emphasis.

"Our place here has become the frontline! Comrade Geh says we've got problems, but with Chairman Mao's leadership, we're sure to win!" Shih Defu wiped his brow and absently returned the handkerchief to Orchid, as if he didn't know that it actually had been given to him by Phoenix.

"Break it up, people, let Defu get something to eat," said Old Chen concernedly. "He's been sixty *li* since this morning. That's plenty..."

Talking earnestly, the crowd dispersed, and Shih Defu walked with Shang, Shih Yungkung and Pa Hu toward the district office. As they strolled, Shang told Shih Defu that district chief Tsow had sent a message ordering Shih Defu and Pa Hu to join the guerillas after they wound up the grain station; Tsow wrote that he had already organized over twenty men. To this Shih Defu made no reply. The pressing difficulty was the grain station. Joining the guerillas would come later.

It began to drizzle just as Shih Defu started to eat. Someone shouted that our troops were coming through the upper gorge and instantly Shajya Village came noisily bustling to life. As though welcoming honored guests, the people all stood ceremoniously along the slopes, looking toward the gorge with dancing eyes, while a string of children shot into the gorge like an arrow. From the village's focal point at the mouth of the ravine Carpenter's stentorian throat blared an order.

"Every family hurry and sweep your homes clean! Our troops have halted on the market grounds. They're going to live in our village!"

Shih Defu listened, bowl in hand. Then he told Shih Yungkung and Pa Hu to go down to the gorge and help Carpenter lead the comrades directly to the homes, not to let them stand out in the rain. He himself would quickly finish his meal. If more troops should come to bivouac

east or north of Shajya Village they might decide to draw grain at the village.

A few minutes later, Shih Yungkung and Pa Hu, along with Carpenter, Orchid and Phoenix began leading in groups of the regional militiamen. Every family had cheerfully rushed through a quick job of house-cleaning, and now, laughing and smiling, young and old turned out to greet their rifle-bearing guests. Shih Defu brought his bowl out and continued eating as he stood with Shang and Old Wang outside the big gate of the district government compound. Up from the ravine came Carpenter and several commanders, followed by administrative workers, guards and many mules and horses. Carpenter took them directly to the great compound next to the grain station. This compound had belonged to a landlord and was now occupied by former hired hands' and poor peasants' families. Among the cadres, Shih Defu noticed the two grey-uniformed men Comrade Geh had seen off at Chenchuan that morning.

After the troops had been quartered, Shih Yungkung and Pa Hu returned to the district office in high spirits. The latter was delighted to have found many old militia comrades whom he hadn't seen since more than a year ago when he got his discharge.

"This is regional headquarters we have here in our village," said Pa Hu quietly. "From the looks of things, all the villages to the north are filled with troops of the Fourth and Sixth Militia Regiments."

Shih Yungkung crinkled his eyes joyfully. "There's still no sign of the enemy from Sweideh. Maybe we're going to wipe out the ones in Chenchuan first."

Shih Defu advised them to calm down, that our leaders certainly had a plan. He set his bowl on the table and wiped his mouth with the palm of his hand. Then he told them to come along with him to the grain station to prepare to issue supplies.

The regional militia stationed in and around Shajya Village kept sending men through the intermittent drizzle to draw grain. While the tired troops slept all afternoon, Carpenter and the girls took wheat kernels from the militia's quartermaster and distributed them among the local households to be converted into dry rations for the men. At the station Shih Defu and the others continued issuing grain until dusk, when the militia porters stopped coming. Shih Yungkung calculated that they had already distributed about eighteen piculs, and that aside from the hundred piculs of millet and wheat they were reserving for the Field Army, there were less than ten piculs left.

"Good!" said Shih Defu with satisfaction. He thought of the instructions Comrade Geh had given for the disposal of the remaining supplies.

According to peasant porters working with the militia, Hu Tsung-nan's Thirty-sixth Division had entered Chenchuan at about noon. The enemy had set up a line of outposts running to the river flats, and not a peasant was to be seen anywhere along the slope.

Shih Defu organized the villagers to help issue the hundred piculs of grain during the night. Acting on Commissioner Geh's recommendation of the experience in Chenchuan, Shih Defu decided to weigh the grain instead of measuring it for the sake of speed when the Field Army would come. Two scales from the fodder section, which had finished issuing all its supplies, were brought over to the grain section. Several lanterns were borrowed, wicks prepared and the lanterns filled with oil, then hung inside the grain cave and at its entrance. Orchid and Phoenix offered to help, but Shih Defu told them to work with Carpenter looking after the troops. Then Shih Defu conferred with Shang. They agreed that they needn't wait for the district Party secretary to return, but that they should immediately divide all the cadres into two teams: Shih Defu, Shih Yungkung and Pa Hu should continue working together, and handle the millet; Shang, Old Chen and Carpenter should distribute the wheat. Old Wang would look after the oil lamps, adding oil and trimming wicks. The division of labor settled, all that remained was to wait for the civilian grain porters. . . .

Around supper time, Party secretary Jin arrived. Between perspiring and having been caught in the rain, his hair was soaking wet. In his hurry, he had forgotten to bring a straw hat. The cadres were delighted to see him back.

"The Wujwang people relayed Commissioner Geh's message to me very late," he said. "I was afraid I'd hold you up. Have you prepared everything?"

Shang and Shih Defu explained what they had done.

"Fine!" Jin was pleased. He removed his homespun blue cloth knapsack. "I've got some news for you. The enemy who occupied Sweideh yesterday are not moving toward Michih and Chenchuan along the highway."

Startled, his listeners stared. "Where are they heading for?"

"Tung Chao's First Division is holding Sweideh. The remaining five and a half brigades under Liu Kan are all rushing toward the banks of the Yellow River."

The riddle was solved at last. "Aiya!" Shih Defu cried, "you see how great Chairman Mao's plan is! He's lured a big section of the enemy over to the east so that our Field Army will have a clear field against Hu's Thirty-sixth Division in the west! Isn't that right, Secretary Jin?"

"Right! That's exactly the reason he pretended to be going to the Yellow River!" Jin replied cheerfully. Young Shih Defu's clear-sightedness surprised him.

The men told Jin of the stories circulating about Chairman Mao leaving the previous day, and how worried they had been. Jin laughed.

"We're always shouting, 'Protect Chairman Mao, protect the Party Central Committee.' They're staying right here with us in northern Shensi. They don't need the Field Army to protect them; in fact they're

cooperating with it! Our job right now is to help our Field Army to wipe out Hu's Thirty-sixth Division, no matter what the difficulties!"

"Good!" Every man's confidence had increased hundredfold. They were ready to work right through the night distributing grain as soon as the civilian porters arrived.

It was dark by the time Secretary Jin started having a bite to eat. All day there had been black tumbled clouds overhead, with occasional showers in the afternoon. Now the rain began falling in a tremendous downpour. . . .

XI

In the pitch black night, heavy rain fell on the mountain ridges and in the valleys. Water poured in a steady stream from the eaves of the cave homes; the courtyards turned into little lakes; the yellow earth mountain roads of northern Shensi became quite impassable. Old Chen, in traversing even the short path from the cooperative to the district office, slipped and skidded several times.

By about ten p.m., the rain still hadn't let up. Jin and Shih Defu sat on the high threshold of the district office, talking as they watched the endlessly descending sheets of water. The light of an oil lamp on a table behind them illumined the forms of Shih Yungkung, Pa Hu, Carpenter and Old Chen, sleeping with their clothes on. It didn't seem likely that the grain porters would come in such a storm, and Jin had told the cadres to get some rest while they waited. Although the enemy occupied Chenchuan, because our Fourth and Sixth Regional Militia Regiments were nearby and the headquarters was stationed right in the village, the men slept more soundly than they had for several days.

Jin and Shih Defu discussed the grain station. Actually, work there had virtually halted since the 14th; everyone was preparing for the coming battle. Jin spoke of the military situation. He completely approved of Shih Defu having ordered Shih Yungkung and Pa Hu to move their women and children out of Shajya Village. Jin said that this battle probably would be a very big one; that after the grain station was wound up, there would be new tasks in support of the front.

"At Cedar Rise, I heard that the enemy is boasting this time they're going to finish us off in northern Shensi. Hu Tsung-nan has only three strong divisions. The First is holding Sweideh, in the south; the Thirty-sixth is occupying Chenchuan to the west; the Ninetieth left Sweideh today to blockade the fording points along the Yellow River. They're trying to lock us up in a great encirclement. Three of their brigades under Liu Kan bypassed Michih and went directly to Hsia county in an attempt to catch Chairman Mao and the Central Committee. . . ."

"Aiya, the enemy sure has plenty of crafty schemes!" Shih Defu looked at Jin in astonishment.

"That they do, but they're going to fall into their own trap." Jin set his jaw. "I hear that if we fight well this time, the enemy will collapse. They'll never be able to stage another attack."

"Then the Thirty-sixth Division isn't the only enemy force we're preparing to hit?"

"Of course not," laughed Jin. "Figure it out for yourself—if we wipe out the Thirty-sixth Division, do you think Liu Kan and Tung Chao will stand idly by? For that reason when I got ready to come back, vice chief of county Gwo instructed me to hold you men ready for other duties after you wound up the grain station. So you won't be joining district chief Tsow and his guerillas, nor can Shih Yungkung and the others trot off to be with their families. You have to win them over to this idea, and get ready to cope with new jobs...."

"Just a minute...." Shih Defu rose to his feet and walked over to where the men were sleeping. He saw that Shih Yungkung had covered his middle with an end of the thin quilt. Relieved, Shih Defu returned to his seat on the threshold.

"What are you worried about?" Jin asked. "I'm going to tell everyone anyhow after we close down the grain station."

"I wasn't afraid of them hearing," Shih Defu explained. "I wanted to make sure Shih Yungkung was covered. His stomach is bad and the weather is rotten. It'd be a nuisance if his stomach started bothering him at a time like this. You were saying. . .?"

It was obvious that Comrade Jin's words had increased Shih Defu's awareness of this campaign's importance. Like all Party leaders, Jin, of course, was delighted to see a comrade under his leadership devoting all his attention to his work. He patted Shih Defu's thick strong shoulder.

"Do you think when the going gets rough they'll be able to stick with you on the job?" he asked affectionately.

Shih Defu considered for a moment. "I think so," he said. "There's no question about Pa Hu. Carpenter is very progressive too, and he's got guts. Shih Yungkung will be all right if he doesn't get sick. He's a Party member, and now that his wife and children are safe, there shouldn't be any problems. There's only Old Chen; he's pretty old. I'm afraid he won't be able to keep up with us. Aren't there some things in the co-op that have to be moved north? I think we ought to ask him to deliver them after we finish at the grain station."

"Alright," Jin consented. "You make sure to win them over and everything will work out."

He went on to say that according to vice chief of county Gwo's calculations, as soon as we struck at the Thirty-sixth in the west, the large body of the enemy in the east would turn this way. Gwo figured that any place along the road from Wulungpu to Chenchuan might turn into a battleground. Therefore Jin wanted Shih Defu to be fully prepared to conquer any difficulty and lead the others in supporting our

fighting forces. This, he said, was what the regional Party committee meant in its directive when it referred to a time of testing the cadres and masses of the Sweideh Region.

"Let me tell you something," said Jin, and he proceeded to relate an account he had heard from a group of grain porters of how wounded soldiers were transported across the Yellow River from a rear line hospital in Wulungpu. "Most of the strong young men in that section were serving away from home as grain porters. But when the call for help went out, in every village along the highway to the fording point, every available man, woman and child from fourteen to forty volunteered. They moved those soldiers from village to village. Even housewives carried stretchers. Some of the stronger men carried the wounded on their backs. The masses made up a slogan: Don't leave one wounded soldier on the west side of the river. . . ."

Shih Defu listened, entranced. "Those cadres there really did a wonderful job!"

He told Jin of the courageous civilian porters from the Yulin front proceeding to Chenchuan to pick up grain, how they had disregarded the enemy lobbing mortar shells at them from across the Wuding River.

"Yes," said Jin. "That's just the spirit we need here to help our army fight!"

"We'll give everything we've got," Shih Defu said confidently. "We're not going to fall behind anybody."

It was still raining very heavily; the earth and the sky were black. The storm showed no sign of abating. Jin shook his head anxiously.

"Tough," he mumbled. "How can our troops get into position tonight? This rain came at the worst possible time. . . ."

"I wonder where Chairman Mao is right now," Shih Defu said with deep concern. He watched the torrents cascading from the sky.

"Chairman Mao . . ." Jin turned and looked at Shih Defu. The secretary had heard about the fearlessness of Chairman Mao when the three enemy brigades were not far behind him, how he had calmly and openly travelled in broad daylight. Jin was unwilling to tell this to Shih Defu for fear of worrying him. When Jin had left Cedar Rise a comrade from Wulungpu said that Chairman Mao had turned north from that city shortly after noon. The civilian grain porters who crowded the streets all had seen him, and they were anxious about his safety.

But Jin only answered, "We don't have to worry about Chairman Mao. He acts according to his plans. I think we two ought to get some sleep. The porters won't be able to reach here tonight."

"You turn in first. I want to wait a little longer and see when this rain finally stops." Shih Defu couldn't get the grain porters out of his mind.

"Go to sleep." Jin got up and pulled Shih Defu by the hand. "It's such a big rain that even if it stops the mountain roads will be too slippery

for travel. There's no use staying up for nothing. We've got hard work ahead tomorrow."

They both retired. The rain continued to pour. . . .

* * *

The lamps of Shajya Village gradually went out. Only the paper windows of the caves occupied by the headquarters section in the big courtyard next to the grain station continued to show light. As villagers living in that compound said later on, in one of the caves they heard something like a bird twittering all the time and an occasional clacking noise. This, of course, was the radio station that headquarters had set up, keeping constant contact with higher and lower command units. On the narrow strip of mountainous country between the Wuding and Yellow Rivers, both sides had concentrated tens of thousands of men. The quiet of this rainy night was only the brewing of still more activity to come.

The rain slackened in the middle of the night, then stopped completely toward dawn. Shih Defu was the first one up in the district office. He was awakened by the sound of people walking and talking in the street.

Perhaps it was because he had never shouldered so heavy a responsibility as the grain station before, perhaps he had been stimulated by Jin's description of the coming developments; in any event, Shih Defu had slept poorly. He had very little sleep for two nights. His eyelids seemed glued together; he slept fitfully and woke suddenly. He knew when the rain had lessened; he knew when it stopped. As soon as people began to stir in the village, he could sleep no longer. What time it was, he had no idea. He only knew the cocks hadn't crowed yet. He got out of bed and lit the lamp. . . .

Someone pounded on the gate and shouted, "Is this the district government office?" "Yes, right here!" Shih Defu ran barefooted to open the gate. He thought to himself—those civilian grain porters must have had a hard time. . . .

But when he let the caller in, he saw a young comrade carrying a flashlight, with a Mauser pistol strapped to his side. Since the young man wore a grey uniform, he couldn't be leading porters for the Field Army, which wore brown. From the fact that the comrade's uniform was quite dry, Shih Defu concluded that he must be with the militia unit which spent the night in Shajya Village.

"Who's in charge of the district?"

"I'm the district Party secretary." Awakened by the noise, Jin stood on the threshold of the cave. "What's up?"

The other men in the cave had also arisen. They too assumed that the porters had come for the grain, and they all came running out. The young comrade turned his flashlight on the men at the doorway, then walked over to Comrade Jin.

"My commander would like to talk to you."

"Good," said Jin. "Wait till I get my hat." He went back into the cave.

Standing in his bare feet beside the comrade, Shih Defu asked what the district secretary was wanted for. The other cadres gathered round to listen.

"You civilians shouldn't be asking so many questions," the young soldier replied with a wave of his hand.

"We're all cadres here," Shang explained. "We work in the grain station. . . ."

But just then Jin came out, and the soldier went off with him. The men followed as far as the compound gate. Lamps were glowing in many of the cave homes along the ravine and a plume of white smoke rose from the cave where the militia had set up its kitchen. Food was being prepared for the troops.

"They're getting ready to move," said Pa Hu. He could tell this from his previous experience in the army.

"Maybe they're going to attack Chenchuan," Shih Yungkung surmised. "The clouds are blowing south. It looks like it's going to be clear. . . ."

"That's probably it," Carpenter nodded. "If they sent for Secretary Jin, it must be to start some kind of mobilization."

Shih Defu recalled how anxious Secretary Jin had been the night before during the rain storm, and he didn't dare to be too hopeful.

"I'm only afraid the Field Army couldn't march last night. . ." he said.

"We'll know the whole story when Secretary Jin comes back," said Shang.

Somewhere a cock crowed, and all the neighboring roosters took up the cry. Nights are short in summer; dawn follows quickly after cock's crow. Where were the Field Army's civilian porters who were supposed to call for the hundred piculs of grain? Shih Defu remembered Commissioner Geh's instruction to distribute the remaining grain among the villages north of the highway if the situation took a turn for the worse. Then another thought came to him—if the Field Army hadn't been able to move, could it be that these regional militia units were getting ready for a possible attack by the enemy now in Chenchuan?

The militia bugles blew reveille, and before their last echoes died away, whistles began to shrill. Lamps were lit throughout the village, flashlights came into play all along the ravine. Two shadowy figures could be seen carrying a lantern and walking up the ravine. The men peered through the dimness.

"Orchid and Phoenix." Shih Defu was the first to make them out.

"What are they doing up so early?" Carpenter wondered. "Can they be looking for me? Why, they are! You see, they're coming this way. . . ."

A moment later, the girls came rushing up the stone-flagged slope to the district office.

"What's going on?" they asked excitedly. "The troops are going to leave. . . ."

The men surrounded them. "How do you know?"

"I heard the comrades living in our compound talking," replied Phoenix. "They said the enemy is coming. . . ."

Startled, the men looked at one another. "How can the enemy be so crazy?"

"Did you hear clearly?" Shang asked Phoenix. "Is the enemy coming; or is the Field Army coming and the Fourth and Sixth Militia Regiments moving out to make room for it?"

"Tell us how you heard it," said Shih Defu.

"It's the enemy that's coming," said Phoenix positively. "I heard someone knocking at our compound gate. When I got up and opened it, a comrade with a rifle came in and showed a sheet of paper to the troops living with us —"

"He was passing around the order," Pa Hu interrupted.

"Right," said Phoenix. "After they read it, he left. I went back to our cave, and as I was going in, I heard the men talking in the next cave. One comrade said, 'Hey! That Thirty-sixth Division is pretty fast. So now they're going to dash out here?' Another comrade said, 'They know our outfit is no match for them! . . .'"

"Doesn't that mean our troops are going to leave?" asked Orchid.

There was no doubt about it. The girls were right. But why was the enemy in such a hurry to come to Shajya Village? The first thing the men thought of was the grain station. They guessed that after occupying Chenchuan and finding it empty, the enemy might have decided to come after the grain in Shajya Village. The civilian grain porters hadn't arrived in time because of last night's rains. The men were very worried. Phoenix and Orchid said that was just the reason they had come to report the news. . . .

Shih Yungkung turned anxiously to Shang. "Can't these militia regiments hold out?" Shih Yungkung always relied completely on the military forces for everything.

"How can local militia units stand up against the enemy's major strength?" replied Shang.

"Ai!" Shih Yungkung sighed disappointedly. "If they could only hold out for a little while until the civilian porters picked up our grain, and then left, that would be fine." Suddenly he remembered what Shih Defu had said, and asked him, "Didn't you say the militia stayed in Chenchuan yesterday until the porters had cleared out all the grain?"

"Maybe that's what they called Secretary Jin to talk about," said Carpenter. "What do you think, Defu?"

Everyone looked at Shih Defu, standing in his bare feet, like a stone pillar. Shih Defu finally grasped the full meaning of the words Jin had

spoken to him the night before — there would be plenty of difficulties even before the Thirty-sixth Division was wiped out.

"Let's wait until Secretary Jin comes back and tells us the set-up. Then we can talk some more." Shih Defu was already prepared for any eventuality. He spoke calmly and slowly. "I think the militia regiments probably won't protect us. They covered the porters taking grain out of Chenchuan because the city was separated from the enemy by the Wuding River. But from Chenchuan to here is a flat open stretch. Unless our Field Army can get here, the Fourth and Sixth Militia Regiments won't be able to stand up against the Thirty-sixth. . . ."

"Maybe only the headquarters section is moving out first, and leaving the regiments to cover us," hazarded Pa Hu.

Old Chen had been listening carefully. He heaved a deep sigh. "Right now the important thing is how soon the civilian grain porters can arrive!" he said.

Shih Defu urged the men not to lose their heads. "At any rate, I figure the enemy won't dare to set out until daylight," he said. "The earliest they could get here would be nine or ten in the morning. If only the porters come, even if the militia regiments pull out, we can issue grain just like they did in Chenchuan until the enemy gets here. The rain puts us in this pickle; but there's no use talking about that."

He related the story Secretary Jin had told him of how wounded soldiers were moved from the Wulungpu hospital.

"You see how the cadres and people over there solved problems!" Then he asked, "Do we have more trouble than civilians working at the front? They have no day and no night. They eat one meal and miss the next. We few cadres run a village grain station. What does a little trouble like ours amount to?"

Shih Defu turned to Shih Yungkung and Carpenter. "Don't always be expecting the best and you won't get flustered when trouble comes. When the militia leaves we're not going to drop the grain station and run after them, are we?"

"Of course not!"

Carpenter said he would stick to the end, no matter how difficult or dangerous things became; he was only guessing whether the militia regiments would protect them, he wasn't afraid. "I'm no model," he told Shih Defu, "but you are. This time I'm going to try to be like you!"

"I'm only worried that we may lose the grain," Shih Yungkung explained.

"It's up to us to do our best," said Shih Defu. "As long as we do what's right by Chairman Mao and the people, even if we do lose the grain we can still hold our heads up. Secretary Jin will be back pretty soon. No matter what the situation is, not one of us must show any panic. Don't make him lose faith in us. What do you say?"

"Right!" chorused the others, and Old Chen's voice was among the rest.

"We can't ask an old man like you to keep up with us," Shih Defu said courteously. "Secretary Jin and I were talking about you last night. You ought to move away the things in our co-op."

"No," Old Chen said firmly. "I tied up the things that have to be moved, last night. Let Jang take them away. I'll stay here and tend to concealing the rest. Then I can help you."

"All right," assented Shih Defu. "Clerk Shang, I think we ought to get a meal going. We won't have much time to eat once the porters get here."

Shang and Old Wang had been saying nothing all this time. They had been standing off to one side, with their eyes fixed on the road along which Jin would return.

"Noodles would be quickest," Shang said to Old Wang. "Go back and get the fire started."

Deeply stirred by all they had heard, Orchid and Phoenix volunteered, "We'll help Old Wang with the cooking."

"Secretary Jin is coming!" announced Shang. Everyone looked. Jin was striding rapidly up the stone-flagged walk.

* * *

In times of battle, the situation fluctuates rapidly and often. After the militia's bugles sounded mess call, and the streets of Shajya Village were full of bustling soldiers, the cadres all crowded into the caves that housed the district government to hear the report of the district Party secretary.

"The regional militia headquarters section has just received a message," Jin was saying. "A part of the enemy Thirty-sixth Division is advancing east from Chenchuan toward Wulungpu, to tie in with Liu Kan's brigades moving north from Sweideh. Our Field Army couldn't set out last night because of the big rain. The Fourth and Sixth Militia Regiments can't stand up against the Thirty-sixth Division, and they've been ordered to leave Shajya Village, because it's on the main highway to Wulungpu and right in the enemy's line of march. The porters who were supposed to call for the hundred piculs of grain for the Field Army were held up by the rain too. They're now in Wujwang district, fifty *li* north of here. Even if they rushed to Shajya Village, they couldn't get the grain out in time. Commissioner Geh has sent me a telegram through the headquarters section of the regional militia, saying that the civilian grain porters aren't coming. . . ."

"Aiya!" cried several of the cadres. "What's going to happen to our grain?"

"Stop your sighing," said Shih Defu. "Let Secretary Jin finish!"

Jin continued. "Commissioner Geh has ordered us to mobilize all the people north of the Chenchuan-Wulungpu highway to come and draw the grain, and distribute it for safekeeping among themselves. We should give out as much grain as possible. The telegram says that if by

nightfall the enemy doesn't occupy Shajya Village, and if they haven't destroyed the grain, or if they haven't destroyed it all, we should keep on giving it out. At the same time, we should send someone to Cedar Rise to report, so that, if necessary, porters can be sent from there. The commander of the regional militia regiments and the political commissar say our grain station cadres will have a hard time, but they should be bold. Don't run too far away when the enemy comes. Once they've passed, come back and see what they've done to the grain."

Turning to Shih Defu, Jin said, "You remember what I talked to you about last night. Now the time has come for us to be tested. What do you think? Do you believe you can carry out your job?"

"What about it?" Shih Defu asked the cadres. "Do you still mean what you said just now?"

"Of course we mean it!" they responded.

Pleased, Jin asked Shih Defu, "So you've talked to them about this?"

Shih Defu nodded. Pointing at Orchid and Phoenix, he said, "They told us the troops were leaving, and we all talked it over. You'd better get started with the mobilization work!"

"That's right," Jin agreed. He directed Shang to go to Fifth *Hsiang* and begin mobilizing, Carpenter to go to the *hsiang* government in Kung-jya Gully and tell the *hsiang* chief and the branch Party secretary that one should handle Fourth *Hsiang* and the other Sixth *Hsiang*, after which Carpenter should return to help at the grain station. Old Chen couldn't move very fast because of his age; Jin sent him to help the cadres in a nearby village with the mobilization. Jin said he need not return, then ordered:

"Everyone set out at once!"

"Things have to be cleaned up in the district office —" Shang began.

"You don't have to bother about that," said Jin. "Shih Defu, Shih Yungkung and Pa Hu can help me do that before the grain porters come. I'll stay till the last possible minute, then I and Old Wang will take our documents over to the Fifth *Hsiang* government. We'll have our district office there temporarily. If anything comes up, you can get in touch with me there. . . ."

Shang, Old Chen and Carpenter departed. Orchid and Phoenix, after rolling up their sleeves and washing their hands, went to help Old Wang prepare breakfast. Jin remembered he had to get in touch with Tsow, and told Shih Defu and Shih Yungkung to start packing up the things in the district office, while he got off a letter to rush to Second *Hsiang*.

Everyone was plunged into such intense activity that the second call of the cocks went unnoticed. The sky was becoming lighter all the time. The bugles of the troops sounded assembly, and the militiamen poured into the great gorge. Pa Hu, who had been out finding a messenger for Jin's letter, returned and said the Fourth and Sixth Militia Regiments had come through the gorge, then left the main road and headed north.

XII

Although all preparations had been made beforehand, the peasants were very uneasy when the troops left. Some of the families in Shajya Village cooked breakfast before dawn, but had no time to eat it; others didn't even bother to cook. Everyone was busy sorting over the articles they still hadn't concealed. People who ordinarily didn't consider their possessions particularly numerous, now suddenly seemed to find themselves swamped with worldly goods—bedding and clothing and utensils. Many hated to abandon the odds and ends useful in daily life; even mulberry twig baskets were not considered expendable. A few even thought it necessary to bury their bellows and cheap earthenware cauldrons. Returning from Second *Hsiang*, Carpenter began shouting as soon as he reached the ravine—women and children should get started sooner because they couldn't travel quickly. He said that the peasants from two of the neighboring villages had left at dawn, right after the troops; the people of Kungjya Gully had gone long ago too. But the inhabitants of Shajya Village were watching Secretary Jin. They said that only when he departed would they take their bundles of clothes and bags of dry rations and hide out in the cliff caves; or perhaps they would drive their oxen, donkeys and sheep north, in the wake of the militia troops. . . .

At the district office, all was in readiness for departure. Two large bundles had been made of the official documents; charts indicating the disposition of cadres, population, land holdings, labor power, and animal power, as well as the pictures of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Chairman Mao and Commander-in-Chief Chu Teh were included too. Shih Defu, with Shih Yungkung and Pa Hu, had carried tables, benches, and the personal effects of the district cadres to nearby homes for concealment in their underground cellars. As Carpenter entered, the cadres were eating the food Orchid and Phoenix had helped Old Wang to prepare.

Carpenter compared the situation in Shajya Village with what he had just seen in other villages, and said, "Secretary Jin, sooner or later you'll have to leave. I think you ought to go right after breakfast. The villagers won't go until you do."

"No! I'm waiting till the peasants from north of the highway come, and then I'll help you give out the grain. When the enemy gets close, we'll leave together. You'd better have something to eat." Bowl in hand, Jin addressed the girls, "You two tell the people not to wait for me, then hurry back and eat so that you can set out with them quickly."

Orchid and Phoenix clapped the flour from their hands and prepared to depart, but Shih Defu asked them to wait a moment. "Secretary Jin," he said, "I know you want to stay here to give us courage. You don't have to! We'll do whatever has to be done, after you go. I'll send Uncle Carpenter with a report to you tonight. In the first place, it's more important for you to take the documents away than to help with the

grain. In the second place, if you don't leave, many of the people will think it's not time for them to go either." He turned to Shih Yungkung and Pa Hu, "What do you think?"

"That's right," they replied. Both of them were perspiring from the hot noodles they had eaten. "As you pass through the villages, tell them to hurry and pick up our grain," they urged Jin.

"Then you girls better have a bite to eat and leave," said Shih Defu.

Orchid and Phoenix looked at Jin. "What shall we do?"

"You two can go." Jin was still determined. "Old Wang, take the documents and go first. I'll leave with the others later."

Carpenter had just filled his bowl with noodles. Now he too joined the argument. "Secretary Jin, why be like that? What Defu says is right. It's all the same to us cadres whether you stay or go. But it makes a big difference to the women and children. If they wait too long and can't get away in time, things might be pretty bad."

"Of course!" Phoenix and Orchid chimed in. "They'll all go as soon as they see you leave. . . ."

"Tell them I'm not leaving until the enemy approaches the village! That being the case, I think you two needn't come back here to eat after you've spoken to them. Just take off. They'll leave too when they see you going. Why should they wait for me? Alright, alright! Hurry, now!" Jin, chopsticks in hand, poked the girls' shoulders to hasten them along. His resolution and calm were unshakable.

Shih Defu understood the secretary's motive: Jin was the local Party leader. He was asking cadres of this village to perform a difficult and dangerous task. He had to stand by them firmly during the first tense stage. Then, when trouble or danger arose in the future, thinking of their leader would encourage their determination.

Since the cadres couldn't change Jin's mind, they dropped the subject. Shih Defu had no alternative but to tell the girls to leave at once. Old Wang felt badly that the girls didn't have time for even a bite, after they had worked so hard helping him prepare the meal. They wouldn't starve, said the girls; they had some dry rations.

"Where will you men hide out?" Orchid asked Shih Defu.

He looked from Shih Yungkung to Pa Hu to Carpenter, then offered tentatively, "I think the hills northwest of here would be best. From there we can keep in touch with our people north of the highway and still see what's going on in the village. We don't have any dry rations, but there are a couple of families in a hamlet up there, so food and drink shouldn't be any problem. How does that sound?"

"Good!" said Carpenter, his mouth full of noodles. "There are plenty of little paths in the hills. We can work our way safely through all those small hamlets either to the government offices in Fifth *Hsiang* or in Fourth *Hsiang*."

"Suppose the enemy comes straight across the hills?" Shih Yungkung demanded doubtfully.

"Don't be scared," said Pa Hu. "Just stick with us and everything will be all right. If they come in through the hills, we'll work our way north; then, after they've gone, we'll work our way back."

"That's fine." Jin was well satisfied with the ex-soldier's confident air. "Let's do it this way then — be fairly mobile; keep in close touch with us. What's the matter?" This last was to Orchid and Phoenix, who were still standing by, listening. "Why haven't you gone yet?"

"Let us hide out in the hills too," Orchid suggested to Phoenix. "Why should we be stuck in the cliff caves with the old folks, babies and the women? We won't be able to make a move. If we go with these cadres, maybe we can help them."

This proposal had been in Phoenix's mind for some time, but she was afraid Shih Defu wouldn't approve. She glanced at his serious face, then said to Orchid:

"If we go, others will want to go too, for sure. It'll hold the men back if there are too many women along. . . ."

Although she addressed her words to Orchid, everyone knew she was actually talking to Shih Defu, and all looked toward him. Because of his relationship with Phoenix, Shih Defu didn't dare to express himself; instead, he, in turn, looked at Jin. The secretary asked the girls how many women would probably want to go along with them? The girls figured — of the women who were young, without infants, and who were particularly energetic, there were about seven or eight.

Orchid went a step further. "We may not stay with the men. If the Field Army comes down and fights here, we may have other work to do, like taking care of the wounded. Anything would be better than tucking us away in those cliff caves."

"Very good," said Jin. "But you must operate the same as you did last time when the wounded came through Shajya Village — get everyone to work together; don't go running around by yourselves. You mustn't separate yourselves from the people." Recalling the situation between Phoenix and Shih Defu, the secretary asked her, "Will your parents let you go off with the men?"

Phoenix reddened slightly. "It's all right. They're too busy to try and control me at a time like this. Anyhow, there's no guarantee that if I go to the cliff caves. . . ."

The others couldn't help laughing.

"Her parents are too busy," Orchid agreed. "We came here before dawn, and now the sun is already up, but they still haven't called her. Well then, Defu, after we talk to the villagers, we'll go into the hills!"

"Bring some dry rations for us too," smiled Shih Defu. He was very glad that the girls were going along.

The girls promptly departed. Carpenter, Pa Hu and Old Wang had high praise for their spirit. With the village cadres and more useful peasants away at the front, the work Orchid and Phoenix were doing was proving extremely valuable. Formerly, Shih Yungkung had regarded the

enthusiasm of Phoenix at her job with reservations. Suspecting that it was only because she wanted to be near Shih Defu, he seldom had a good word to say about her. Now, for the first time he trusted her, and joined in the compliments of the others.

Shih Defu only laughed softly, and said, "Let's stop the chatter, and eat. They'll be coming for the grain soon. . . ."

* * *

Peasants arrived from the nearest village after the cadres finished their meal, but before the usual breakfast hour. There were about fifty of them, young and old, carrying sacks and rope. Headed by their administration clerks, they came noisily trooping up the ravine. Just at this time, word came that the enemy had set out from Chenchuan and had entered the big gorge. The Shajya villagers, informed by Orchid and Phoenix that the district Party secretary was remaining with the grain station cadres, began to move out. Leading children, carrying bundles, driving oxen, pulling donkeys, group after group left the village.

Jin sent Carpenter to stand lookout on the hill south of Shajya Village, and ordered Shih Defu to go with Shih Yungkung and Pa Hu to issue grain at the station. After a last minute check up of the district office with Old Wang, Jin turned the official documents over to the old man and directed him to deliver them to Shang at the district headquarters in Fifth *Hsiang*, then wait there. Wang departed and Jin headed for the grain station. On the slope he saw an old woman of about sixty carrying a cotton-padded vest in one hand and a bulging sack in the other. She was teetering rapidly up the slope ahead of him. Quickening his stride, Jin caught up with her.

"Old lady," he said courteously, "everyone else has gone to hide in the cliff caves. What are you doing here?"

The old woman was panting from her climb. "I'm Shih Yungkung's mother, and I'm bringing him some dry rations and this vest. He has a bad stomach. I'm afraid that the chill in the early morning and late evening. . . ." She continued her quick steps as she talked.

"Take my advice, old lady, and leave right away. Give your packages to me. I'll deliver them for you."

"There are a few things I want to tell him. . . ."

"He's got no time to talk to you." Jin walked ahead of her up the path. Leaning forward as they mounted the incline, he explained, "With all these people coming for grain, you'll never be able to squeeze your way through the crowd. You tell me, then I'll speak to him. You'd better hurry and hide. The enemy will be here soon. Don't you know that?"

"I'm not afraid." The old lady stopped listening and concentrated on climbing.

Peasants laden with sacks of grain began descending from the station, while another large group, carrying rope and white sacks, came up from the ravine. Jin's inquiry revealed that they were from a village in Fourth

Hsiang. Streams of people, moving in opposite directions, forced the old lady against the wall of one of the compounds lining the narrow path. A few recognized her as Shih Yungkung's mother and urged her to take refuge, but she paid no heed. It occurred to Jin that she probably wanted to tell her son where she had concealed some valuables, or maybe she was even carrying it in the little bag. Making no further effort to convince her, he hurried on ahead.

The courtyard of the grain station was full of people. Some were tying filled sacks; others were just entering the station; still more were pouring through the compound gate. Jin stepped up on the high threshold and shouted to those in the rear to wait outside the compound; crowding would only slow everyone down.

The grain station cave consisted of a line of three large rooms, connected by doors. In the middle room, Shih Defu and Pa Hu, perspiring freely, were weighing sacks, while Shih Yungkung recorded the name of each porter and the amount of grain he had drawn. Peasants who had filled their sacks from the bins in the side rooms crowded into the center room, waiting their turn at the scale. Only one scale was being used; another was lying idle off to one side. Jin surveyed the scene, then addressed Shih Yungkung,

"Let me keep the books. Your mother is outside looking for you. Go out and speak to her and hurry back. Then we'll work two scales!"

Intoning figures and writing at the same time, Shih Yungkung was shocked to a halt by Jin's words. "Aiya! Hasn't she left yet?" He hurriedly turned his place over to the secretary and pushed his way out through the crowd.

Shih Defu clucked his tongue regretfully: Why couldn't the old lady have come earlier, instead of waiting till the busiest moment? Shih Yungkung was always worrying too much about his family, grumbled Pa Hu as he manipulated the scale. He was still tied to his mother's apron strings. . . .

"What's so important that she has to tell him at a time like this?"

"Forget it," said Shih Defu. He peered at the scale and read off the measurements.

Jin could write much faster than Shih Yungkung. He told the peasants to work one scale themselves and he would record the readings from both scales at the same time; they would try to distribute the grain quickly, so that not one person who came to Shajya Village would have to leave empty-handed. This announcement was greeted with shouts of approval. The way Jin had remained and threw himself into the work drew many respectful glances, and made Shih Defu and Pa Hu increase their efforts.

One man, well over fifty, dragged to the scale a sack so filled with grain that he couldn't lift it on to the weighing hook. It weighed in at 130 lbs.

"You're no youngster," Shih Defu said to him. "That sack's too heavy for you. It'll drag you to the ground before you're half way home. If the enemy comes along, you'll have to drop it and run. Spill some of it back and we'll weigh it again."

The man looked again at Jin, working at full speed. "Write it down!" he insisted stubbornly. "If I fall, I'll get up again. I'm going to carry this sack home!" He set his jaw, and staggered out with the bag in his arms, urging his comrades to carry as much as they could manage. . . .

The man's spirit was fine, Jin said to the peasants, but they shouldn't try to tote too much because the enemy might be coming very soon. "If you see that he's having trouble on the road, help him out a little."

"Don't worry," they replied. "We won't lose him. Let's get on with the weighing."

With two scales in operation and Jin keeping the records, the peasants from the first village quickly completed their drawing. As the men from Fourth *Hsiang* were taking their turn, Shih Yungkung finally returned. He was holding the cotton-padded vest and the bag of dry rations. The sight of the district Party secretary busily making entries of the readings from two scales simultaneously brought a flush of embarrassment to Shih Yungkung's face. Pa Hu shot a glance at the things in Shih Yungkung's hands.

"What did she have to say that took so long?"

"What else!" said Shih Yungkung dejectedly. "She was afraid that if I caught a chill my stomach would act up. She really. . . ."

"Don't talk too much," interrupted Shih Defu, sliding the weight along a scale. "Put your things down and pitch in!"

Peasants from two more villages arrived when the drawing by the men from the second village was half completed. In the vicinity of the grain station, the waiting crowds were greater and denser than on market day.

Suddenly someone shouted, "Coming this way, coming this way!" and people began to run in all directions.

The peasants inside the cave also became upset, thinking the enemy troops were coming, and got ready to flee too. How could they have gotten here so fast? Jin wondered. Then there was a droning sound, growing in volume. It was a plane "coming this way. . . ."

"Don't be afraid!" called the secretary. "Who'll go outside and organize those people? Let them take shelter under the trees and beside the walls, and come for their grain in small groups."

"I'll do it!" said Pa Hu.

"Right," Shih Defu consented. Then he said to the peasants in the cave, "Suppose every one helps weigh the grain he draws, how will that be?"

"Good!" Several men waiting their turn came forward and took up the scales.

There was a note of menace in the droning of the plane as it circled above Shajya Village. Most of the village's inhabitants were already gone, and Pa Hu directed the men who had come for the grain to places of relative safety beneath the trees, alongside walls and in the gateways of deserted compounds. Then the plane flew away and the men gradually emerged again and came toward the grain station. Standing on a mound wall outside the gate, Pa Hu shouted for them not to come all at once. He conferred with the administration clerks of the different villages, and arranged that the men should come a batch at a time, to avoid any panic in case the plane returned. The grain continued to be parcelled out in this way — fast but orderly.

About a half hour later, when only a handful of peasants from the last two villages had not yet drawn their grain, Carpenter came tearing in from his post on the hilltop.

"The enemy is at Kungjya Gully! They're only five *li* from here!"

"Are they coming across the hills or through the gorge?" asked Jin.

"The whole lot of them are coming through the gorge," Carpenter panted. "The gorge is filled with khaki. A small group in front is moving very fast!"

"That's their advance guard!" said Pa Hu.

"We can't finish!" Jin exclaimed. "Put things in order, quick!"

Men with sacks which hadn't been weighed dumped back their contents and ran out with empty bags. While Carpenter and Pa Hu swept up the grain littering the floor, Jin and Shih Defu closed and sealed the two side storerooms, then all four men boarded up the windows of the cave. Shih Yungkung hastily made a package of the record books. Shih Defu locked the door and took the books from Shih Yungkung. All hurried down into the ravine. They were the last to leave the village.

Halfway through the ravine, they suddenly heard a voice urging, "Faster, faster! The enemy has reached the upper gorge!"

A man over seventy was leaning on his staff, on a mountain path above them. He was a native of the village, with a long white beard that always aroused considerable admiration. Very concerned, Shih Defu and Carpenter hailed him.

"Why haven't you gone into hiding?"

"Never mind about me. Hurry up and run!"

"What's the old man like usually?" Jin asked the cadres. "Why hasn't he left?"

"He's all right. He's been a poor peasant and hired hand all his life," Shih Defu replied. "One of his sons is in the Fourth Militia Regiment. He probably thinks it would be too hard for him to hide in the cliff caves. Maybe he feels he's so old the enemy won't bother him if he stays in the village."

"Aiya! Run!" shouted Shih Yungkung, and sprinted as fast as his legs would carry him. Far off in the upper gorge the enemy's advance guard had made its appearance.

But Jin merely lengthened his stride, and the others had to resist any impulse they might have had to race ahead of him. He led them past the rear of a row of houses into the gorge, then across the stream where it made a turn, and through a small gully into the hills. Soon they stopped and squatted down in a field of high sorghum on the hill side northwest of Shajya Village. Shih Yungkung, looking very embarrassed, was already there waiting for them.

* * *

The enemy's advance guard consisted of one platoon. It marched along the empty little street without stopping, but the men kept peering from left to right, talking as they walked. Then they reached the main highway again, and followed it to the northeast. Five pairs of eyes were watching them through the sorghum stalks, staring at their American type service caps, at their shorts — these soldiers of Hu Tsung-nan just didn't look like Chinese. Only their leader wore long trousers, but he had an American helmet liner on his head. The advance guard was soon out of sight down the highway.

Equipped with various types of American arms, the enemy's main body came into Shajya Village. Group after group of men and pack animals came out of the gorge and marched through the village's narrow street, then, twisting and turning like a great snake, re-entered the continuation of the gorge. The rifles, ammunition, knapsacks, bayonets and kettles with which these foreign-looking soldiers were laden clattered in discord with the artillery barrels creaking on the backs of the pack animals. Mounted men followed, some of them wearing dark glasses, gleaming in the sun. Behind these men was a long column of foot soldiers, whose end was nowhere in sight.

Carpenter said in a whisper, "The enemy's not stopping anywhere. Maybe the grain station will be all right today."

"Wait and see what happens when their troops in the rear come up," Jin replied softly. He observed Shih Defu repacking the bundle Shih Yungkung had tied together so hastily. "Don't bother with that. Let those two keep a lookout while we cross to the other side of this ridge and figure how much grain we just distributed."

Holding the bundle in his arms, Shih Defu instructed Carpenter and Pa Hu to be careful not to attract the attention of the enemy by moving around too much, then he and Shih Yungkung set out with Secretary Jin.

They climbed to the top of the ridge and began their figuring in a dense mulberry grove. Jin read off the figures in a low voice and Shih Yungkung calculated them on the abacus, while Shih Defu squatted and stared at the latter's flying fingers to check whether he made any mistakes in manipulating the beads. They could hear the enemy tramping through the gorge. Occasionally a plane swept across the sky, and Shih Yungkung automatically raised his head to look.

"Just keep your mind on your abacus," Shih Defu said. "The plane can't see you in a thick grove like this."

The results of their calculations showed that they had disposed of more than twenty-three piculs; over eighty piculs of grain remained in the station. In other words, one day's provisions for nearly twenty thousand soldiers were still in danger.

Jin sighed. "That's that. I'm afraid Commissioner Geh or vice chief of county Gwo may want to get in touch with our district, so I'd better get over to Fifth *Hsiang*. I can tell you this: the Fourth and Sixth Regional Militia Regiments are resting there; don't be afraid. They say that pretty soon the enemy won't ever be able to act so high-handed again. You men stay here and keep an eye on that eighty piculs of grain. Save as much of it as you can. . . ."

Shih Defu tied up the account books. He was deeply impressed by the example the district Party secretary had set for them all that day.

"Just leave it to us! Even if it's only one measure full, we'll save it if we can," Shih Defu promised. "You don't know these mountain paths. Do you want one of us to go with you part of the way?"

"No. There's no enemy north of the highway. I can't go wrong if I just keep heading north." Again Jin raised the question of the grain station, "The commander and the political commissar of the regional militia both told me this morning — grain is victory; grain is the life of our fighters! I hope you all can stick it out. If possible, I'll be back tonight or tomorrow morning." To Shih Yungkung he said, "I notice you're a little shaky. Can you stay with them to the finish?"

Shih Yungkung appeared very ill at ease. "I've never been to the front; I have no experience. But my home is here. Where else would I go?"

"That's wrong!" said Shih Defu. "This isn't the time to talk about home. What did Secretary Jin just say? We'll die for that grain, if we have to!"

"Yes," said Jin sternly. "You're not remaining here to look after your home! What did your mother tell you that took so long?"

Now that a show-down had come, Shih Yungkung's usual apparent stability and thoroughness proved to be a sham. "It was all because of my stomach trouble!" he stammered awkwardly. "Defu, you know what my mother is like. She even wanted to talk to you, but I forced her to go. That's what took so much time. You don't have to worry about me, Secretary Jin. As long as I'm with Defu, I'll stick to the end."

"It's true," Shih Defu confirmed. "His mother is like that. With all of us together, he'll be all right."

Jin was convinced. He reminded them that "Communists are made of special stuff," and urged them to win the full support of Pa Hu and Carpenter. After telling them what points to pay particular attention to, he departed. They accompanied him a short distance and pointed out

the paths he should follow. They watched him until he was out of sight.

. . .

Panting heavily, Carpenter came running toward them.

"Something terrible has happened! Stinker Huai-tsung and more than a hundred of the enemy have moved into the village! They're grabbing chickens, looting the houses; they're turning the whole village upside-down! The grain station is finished this time! . . ."

XIII

People had forgotten all about Stinker Huai-tsung in the excitement of the past two days. He dropped completely out of sight after the fifteenth, only to suddenly reappear on the streets of Chenchuan, like some slimy insect from under a wet rock, when Hu Tsung-nan's Thirty-sixth Division occupied the city. When the Eighth Route Army first came to the region in 1937, Stinker was the one who had said, "I'd rather hear Japanese artillery than the sweet words of these Eighth Route men." So you can imagine the glee with which he greeted this day for which he had waited so long. Adding the humiliation he had recently suffered at Shajya Village, it is even easier to imagine his frame of mind when he returned to the village along with a hundred or more of the enemy.

Shih Defu and Shih Yungkung quickly followed Carpenter back to his observation post in the sorghum field. They could see enemy soldiers moving in and out of courtyards all over the village; many of them had already gathered outside the district office and grain station compound. Wearing his army knapsack, Pa Hu approached the cadres. He was purple with fury.

"The enemy is going into the grain station yard," he hissed. "It sounds like they're breaking the door down. . . ."

Shih Defu ground his teeth. "Where's Stinker?"

"He's the one who's leading them in. They're dragging the old man along. . . ."

Because of the walls around it, the cadres couldn't see what was actually happening in the compound. Was the enemy about to burn those eighty piculs of grain? Were the soldiers going to remain in the village? Shih Defu cursed himself for being careless and letting Stinker escape that night. The havoc the landlord was now bringing on the village wouldn't have happened otherwise.

"Stinker Huai-tsung, you son of a bitch," swore Shih Defu bitterly, "after we wipe out the enemy, we'll get you just as sure as you can't grow two heads!"

"They may want to torture the old man to say where we've gone," hazarded Carpenter.

Shih Yungkung was alarmed. "No doubt about it! The old man won't be able to stand rough handling, and I saw him watching you come

up the hill. We ought to move back to another peak. That Stinker is pure poison. He'll lead the enemy up here to grab us. . . ."

"You two take the account books, then, and wait for us on that hill back there," said Shih Defu.

"Balls!" Pa Hu exploded. "I can keep watch here alone! Give me another hand grenade. You go too," he said to Shih Defu. "With these grenades I can take care of myself if the enemy comes. I'll give you all cover while you get away!"

Even as he spoke, one group of enemy soldiers began to climb the hill east of Shajya Village, while another group started up the hill west of the village. The situation didn't look good to Shih Defu. In the first place, the enemy would soon be on the same level with the place the cadres were hiding; they could be easily spotted if they had to leave the sorghum field. Secondly, even though the old man was tough, there was no guarantee that he couldn't be tortured into talking.

"We'll all go," said Shih Defu. "It'll be safer if we move back a peak. We're too close to them here. It's dangerous to even speak loud."

Pa Hu didn't agree. "They can't sprout wings, can they? When I see them coming this way, I'll still have time to get away."

"You listen to me." Shih Defu's only thought was for the eighty piculs of grain. "Our duty right now is to watch the grain station, not to fight. If the enemy sets fire to the grain station, we'll be able to see it from the hill further back. At that time we can decide what to do. Let's go!"

Shih Yungkung and Carpenter also urged Pa Hu to follow orders. Finally, the four men withdrew through the sorghum field.

When they reached the knoll where they had seen off Secretary Jin a short while before, the village was no longer visible. Even the grain station courtyard was obscured by the sorghum field. They crouched in a patch of corn and watched the enemy columns that had ascended the two hills; one column turned southeast, the other moved toward the southwest. Pa Hu said the enemy was setting up outposts; they had no intention of searching the hills. He still wanted to return to the sorghum field where he could observe the whole village. The depredations of the enemy enraged this maimed veteran. He begged permission to throw just one hand grenade to shake them up a bit. Shih Defu refused. He reminded Pa Hu that "Grain is victory; grain is the life of our fighters."

"If they set fire to the grain, that will be another story. If they don't, we can settle Stinker Huai-tsung easily enough as soon as they leave, and carry out our orders to rescue the grain!"

Four pairs of eyes bored in the direction of the grain station, but still no smoke arose. Could it be that the enemy had been informed by Stinker, and specially sent the hundred soldiers to seize the remaining grain? Yet surely Hu Tsung-nan's Thirty-sixth Division wasn't crazy enough to let half a company remain here alone overnight?

Slowly, the sun rose to the noon zenith.

Although it was already autumn, it was very hot in the middle of the day. The ground, soaked with the heavy rain of the night before, steamed beneath the merciless sun, adding to the men's discomfort. They had only eaten a little noodles at dawn, and after running around all morning they were absolutely parched. Shih Defu, who hadn't had a good night's sleep in several days, suffered a nosebleed. The men urged him to go and rest in the hamlet where the girls were staying, and ask them to borrow some green beans to make a thirst slaking soup for all to drink. Shih Defu told Shih Yungkung and Carpenter to go; he would remain with Pa Hu.

"After you finish drinking, bring back a jugful for us," said Shih Defu. His nose was bleeding profusely.

"Mm," Shih Yungkung looked at Shih Defu's bloodshot eyes. "You've got a fever. If you're not careful, you'll affect your sight." Shih Yungkung was deeply moved by the way Shih Defu was sticking it out in spite of his suffering. Recalling the instructions Secretary Jin had given on his departure, Shih Yungkung said solicitously, "I'll keep watch here with Pa Hu. You go to that mountain hamlet and rest a while. Cooking in this noonday sun will only make your fever worse. . . ."

"I'm all right," Shih Defu insisted. "Take off with the account books. Tell the girls to put plenty of green beans in the soup. They bring down fever."

Shih Yungkung and Carpenter knew how stubborn Shih Defu could be once his mind was made up, so they wasted no more time. Carpenter asked Pa Hu whether they should take his knapsack with them. Keeping his eyes riveted on the movements of the two enemy squads on the south hills, the ex-soldier only shook his head. Shih Yungkung and Carpenter set out.

They were back in less than an hour. Shih Defu saw them first as their heads emerged in the corn field on the ridge of the hill further back. Strange, that they should return so soon. Had something gone wrong? Had another group of the enemy come out of Chenchuan and cut across the rear hills? Then the heads of two girls appeared to be floating along the tops of the corn tassels. Orchid and Phoenix — immediately followed by Old Chen of the cooperative. They had all come. What was going on?

Shih Yungkung and Carpenter were in the lead, and each was carrying a jug.

The girls had prepared the green bean soup even before the cadres had arrived in the mountain hamlet. Old Chen was there too because he had found the road to his destination cut off by enemy troop movements, and he had wound his way to the hamlet by a circuitous route. Everyone was very upset when not one of the grain station cadres had arrived by noon. Finally, Shih Yungkung and Carpenter showed up. The inhabitants of the hamlet immediately produced two jugs which the girls

filled with green bean soup; then the girls, Old Chen and the cadres all hurried to join Shih Defu and Pa Hu.

"When Shih Yungkung told them that Stinker Huai-tsung had come back to our village, about seven or eight of the women wanted to come with us," Carpenter was saying, "but Orchid insisted that only she and Phoenix should return." As he set down the jugs, the girls had already caught up. Shih Yungkung urged them to crouch down—there were enemy troops on the south hills.

Shih Defu was pleased by the girls' thoughtfulness in preparing the green bean soup, but he criticized them for having deserted the other women.

"Secretary Jin told you two not to go running around by yourselves. What have you come dashing up here for?"

"The women all said that with Stinker bringing soldiers in, there was no telling what damage they'd do to our village," Orchid replied apologetically. "After you finish your soup, we'll take the jugs right back."

"How did you get such a bad nosebleed?" It made Phoenix's heart ache to see Shih Defu in such a condition. She no longer concealed her feelings toward him in the presence of others. She handed him her handkerchief. "Here, take this and wipe your face. . . ."

"Who would have thought Stinker would pull a trick like this!" Old Chen drew near, leaning on a staff.

Taking the handkerchief from Phoenix, Shih Defu said to Old Chen, "Why didn't you stay in the hamlet? If the enemy should decide to come up this hill an old man like you wouldn't be able to move fast enough."

"Never mind. We're a good distance from the gorge here. I just had to see you. Finish your soup quickly."

Shih Yungkung poured a bowl for Pa Hu. The ex-soldier sat on his knapsack like a sentry on duty, concentrating his full attention on the enemy on the south hills while watching for any signs of smoke from the grain station.

The burning noonday sun poured down on the mountain knoll as the cadres squatted in the corn field drinking the green bean soup.

* * *

The Thirty-sixth Division was the most powerful of Hu Tsung-nan's three major forces. During the War of Resistance against Japan it served as the Kuomintang outpost against the Communists. From its station at Lochuan, it specialized in raiding the Liberated Areas. Its anti-communist indoctrination was extremely virulent. This division became insufferably arrogant after Hu Tsung-nan's attack on Yen-an, and launched its raids with the utmost savagery. In the past two months alone it had twice ripped through the great forest on the Shensi-Kansu border, and had made a swing through the desert outside the Great Wall.

Now that it had succeeded in relieving Yulin and followed with a crafty occupation of Chenchuan, its insolence knew no bounds.

Over three thousand men of a brigade of this division had set out from Chenchuan. They were driving directly on Wulungpu in order to join forces there with other Hu Tsung-nan troops moving up from the south. Following the main road, the vanguard of the marchers from Chenchuan had reached Shajya Village at mid-morning, and it wasn't until afternoon before they had all passed through. Then, the hundred enemy soldiers whom Stinker Huai-tsung had induced to stay in the village joined the tail of the long column of men and horses and moved off with it toward the east.

Shih Defu and the others, concealed on the hill north of the gorge, finished their green bean soup and made arrangements for the evening meal. Old Chen and the girls left for the little hamlet from which they had brought the jugs. Shih Defu and the village cadres crept back to the field of high sorghum and surveyed the scene: all the enemy had already left Shajya Village, no new invaders were coming through the upper gorge. The only one in sight was the white-bearded old man. From the mouth of the ravine, he was staring up at the hill on which they were hiding. The men emerged from the sorghum and stood at the edge of the steep incline.

"What are you waiting for?" the old man shouted, waving his hand urgently. "Come and see what the enemy has done to our village!"

Shih Defu turned the packet of account books over to Shih Yung-kung. He said that Shih Yung-kung and Carpenter should remain on the hill, one watching the upper gorge, the other keeping a lookout on the lower. He and Pa Hu would go to the village and question the old man. Pa Hu entrusted his knapsack to Carpenter, then hurried down into the gorge with Shih Defu.

When they reached the village, the old man, leaning on his staff, hobbled out to greet them. He was rubbing his face, one side of which was swollen from enemy blows.

"Bandits! Just bandits!" Shaking his head, the old man said bitterly, "They cleaned out several dozen homes. Cauldrons and bellows, they smashed to bits. They unearthed a few hidden cellars and stole everything that had any value. The rest, they spilled all over the ground. Stinker pointed out to the enemy the homes of five or six Communists and cadres. There, they destroyed even the doors and windows. . . ."

"What about the grain station?" asked Shih Defu. "Did they destroy the grain station?"

"They didn't touch the grain. They only broke open the door to have a look. . . ."

"Why?"

"They said they wanted it for other troops that are coming soon. They told Stinker to find people to guard it. . . ."

Pa Hu clenched his fists. "The cocky bastards!"

"What about Stinker?" Shih Defu was anxious to learn the whole picture. "What did he say? Where has he gone?"

"He scurried up the gorge even before the enemy left. They said that if he takes good care of the grain they'll make him chief of our district. He almost flopped to the ground and kowtowed, begging them not to leave, to search for you; he said you were in the hills near here. He said he'd be back tonight with men to guard the grain station. It looks to me like the enemy hadn't expected to find so much grain here. They said they had to go east. They told Stinker to report the situation to Chenchuan. . . ."

The old man kept shaking his head mournfully. He was worried that Stinker really would come back with a gang before nightfall. In that case the grain would be lost to us. He didn't say a word about how the enemy had beaten him; he only sighed over how they had wrecked the village.

"How will our people be able to live when they move back? You better go see what the enemy did to your homes!"

"Never mind!" Shih Defu comforted him. "We'll fix them up again after we've wiped out the enemy. The most important thing is that the grain is still here. Old Grandpa, we're going to the grain station first. We'll talk some more in a little while." Turning to Pa Hu, Shih Defu said, "Let's hurry. Don't be angry. Just being angry won't do any good!"

In the ravine, they found millet and flour scattered everywhere. Torn containers littered the ground. Through the open gates of the compounds that lined the ravine, they could see the bright colors of women's and children's clothing and smashed furniture flung in disarray about the courtyards. Pa Hu's cellar had been discovered by the enemy too. All of the merchandise he and his wife had bought with his army discharge bonus to set up a little business was gone. Only the splintered pieces of his wooden case remained. Pa Hu stood stock-still, trembling with fury. His eyes practically flamed.

"You dirty Stinker Huai-tsung! The next time I catch you, I'm going to hack you into little pieces!"

"Never mind about your stuff now," Shih Defu pulled him along by the arm. "Where can he run to after we settle with the enemy? Let's get to the grain station!"

The first thing they saw when they reached their destination was that the lock on the door had been changed. The broken remains of their original lock were lying near the threshold.

"Hey! Those rats are smart operators!" Pa Hu picked up a big stone and advanced on the new lock.

Shih Defu stopped him. "Leave it alone. If we break this, where will we get another one? Even if we could, the enemy would smash it anyhow when they came back. We can see in through the cracks."

They peered into the dim recesses of the cave. Everything was still

intact. Measuring implements lay in the middle room just as they had left them. The seals on the two side storage rooms were unbroken.

The eighty odd piculs of grain now had two contending sets of masters.

"If Stinker doesn't show up with his gang by tonight, the grain is ours again!" said Shih Defu. "Pa Hu, let's go!"

The white-bearded old man met them at the compound gate.

"Why have you come here again?" Shih Defu demanded. "Just look what the enemy's done to you! We'll help you up the hill, and send you to rest in the little hamlet. Many of our women are there. They can look after you. You can't stay in the village. It'll be bad for you if the enemy finds you here again. . . ."

"No!" The old man shook his head resolutely. The way they had ignored their own homes and cared only about the public grain had made a great impression on him. His eyes were misty with tears and his throat hoarse as he said, "I won't be a burden to anybody! I'm over seventy. How much longer have I got to live? If the enemy kills me then that will be the end. If they don't, I can watch what Stinker and his gang do and then tell you about it when you come again!" With his sleeve he wiped the tears that rolled down his bruised and swollen cheeks. "You just keep your minds on doing your jobs. . . ."

Shih Defu was so moved he didn't know what to say. Pa Hu looked at the old man's puffed cheeks.

"Why did the enemy hit you?"

"Why?" the old man said angrily. "They asked me when the men in charge of the grain station had left, where had they gone? I pretended to be deaf, said I didn't know. Stinker said to hit me a couple of times and I'd hear all right. They hit me and he hit me, then they asked again. I still didn't know. Stinker told them that I had a son, an old militiaman, who was now in our army. The dog even said that you had purposely left me here to spy on them. He wanted them to shoot me. . . ."

Pa Hu ground his teeth. "Stinker Huai-tsung is rotten to the marrow of his bones!"

"Why didn't the enemy do what he said?" asked Shih Defu.

"They saw that after all I'm only a crippled old man. Besides, they were afraid that firing might scare some of their own soldiers. . . ."

"Come on, then," Shih Defu urged him anxiously. "That Stinker's heart is too black. It would be dangerous for you to stay here. We'll get you to a safe place if we have to carry you."

"No!" The old man was as firm as a rock. "I'm not afraid! The swine said I'm your spy. All right, I'll really spy for you. You'll see. Leave here, quickly!"

Nothing they said could convince him. Finally, filled with admiration for the old man, Shih Defu and Pa Hu were forced to leave him behind.

They walked back through the village. Every home had been despoiled by the enemy. Only the big mansion of the landlord who had fled to Yulin remained unmolested. At the mouth of the ravine, Pa Hu suggested that they take another look at Shih Defu's home. Shih Defu refused. It was no use, he said. Besides, Shih Yungkung and Carpenter must be worried about them.

They ascended the hill.

On learning the situation, Shih Yungkung and Carpenter were consumed with hatred over the savagery of Stinker and the enemy soldiers. They could see from the hill that Shih Defu's cave home too had been reduced to a gaping black hole. Shih Defu told them not to be unhappy about the wrecked dwellings; the important thing was to get hold of the grain as soon as it was dark.

All afternoon they remained on the hill watching the upper gorge for signs of enemy troops. By sunset, none had appeared; in fact there hadn't been the shadow of any person of any kind all along the road. Had Stinker been nabbed by our people on his way to Chenchuan? Or had he failed in his mission after reaching the city? Regardless of the reason, the enemy hadn't come. Shih Defu dispatched Carpenter to report at Fifth *Hsiang*. He told him to stop and eat first at the mountain hamlet, and ask the girls to bring food for the rest of them.

"Let them bring an extra portion. We can send it down to the old man."

"Why not just give him my share? I'll tell the girls about it and go right on. Secretary Jin must be very anxious to get word from us. I can eat in Fifth *Hsiang* after I see him." So saying, Carpenter set off on his long crane-like legs.

* * *

In times of battle, the local cadres were so busy they hardly had time to draw a full breath. When Carpenter started out from Shajya Village, Secretary Jin had long since left Fifth *Hsiang*.

A short time after Jin had reached the temporary district headquarters, a message had come from Gwo, vice chief of county, ordering him to go at once to the village of Aijya Ditch and call a meeting of the cadres of all districts north of the highway. Since the stretcher teams attached to the Field Army only operated near the frontline, it was necessary to organize additional local teams to continue relaying the wounded from village to village, toward the rear. Under the present circumstances, the importance of this job eclipsed that of saving the grain in Shajya Village.

The fighting was about to start.

After a short stop in the mountain hamlet where the girls were staying, Carpenter descended into the gorge. Before long, he was stopped and questioned by one of our scouts, then taken to the nearest village to prove his identity. Finally, he was permitted to go on. It was already

dusk when he reached Fifth *Hsiang* headquarters. The regional militia which had been resting there all day was just pulling out toward the east. He found only Old Wang in the district office, the latter having been directed to remain by Secretary Jin, specifically for the purpose of waiting for him. The two men talked briefly, then Carpenter gulped a few mouthfuls of water and, without stopping to eat, rushed off with Wang to Aijya Ditch.

Aijya Ditch was full of brown-uniformed troops. The Field Army had already arrived. It was pitch dark. In that confusion of noisy milling men, it was impossible to locate anyone. Mules and horses were massed on the river flats in the gorge; village cadres were busy leading the troops to temporary billets which the local residents provided by doubling up with their neighbors. After much fruitless inquiry, Carpenter and Old Wang at last managed to get hold of the village administration clerk. Trailed by a whole string of cadres, he barely had time to talk. In a few breathless phrases he told them that Secretary Jin had held his meeting and gone. Jin and cadres from north of the highway would be moving from village to village; it might not be possible to catch up with them in the course of one night. So far as raising people to carry off grain from Shajya Village was concerned, with the arrival of the Field Army, no village cadre and people from either the Fifth or Sixth *Hsiang* would be available. Secretary Jin had left word that if the grain was still intact Old Wang should report to vice chief of county Gwo at Cedar Rise and that Carpenter should go to the two villages near the highway and try to mobilize people himself. The more grain they could dispose of, the better. . . .

There was no help for it. Carpenter and Old Wang separated and went their different ways. Carpenter ran around half the night. He didn't get back to Shajya Village until cock's crow.

It had been a bleak and gloomy night for the plundered village of Shajya. Although it was a straight run of only fifteen *li* from Aijya Ditch along the gorge flats, here people's hearts were uneasy, and the village presented a disordered scene. Many people returned from the cliff caves and the mountain hamlet after dark to cook some food for the old women and children staying in the hide-outs. When they discovered their stoves smashed beyond repair, the village resounded with sighs and curses. In addition, seven secret cellars had been unearthed by the enemy.

After eating, Shih Defu, Shih Yungkung and Pa Hu had gone down into the village with Old Chen and the girls. Old Chen brought food for the white-bearded old man, while the others helped the families whose cellars had been plundered to set in order what was left. Apparently it was difficult for the enemy to locate cellars hidden in the courtyards or outside the compounds. Shih Defu went from home to home to check on which cellars were comparatively obvious. He had the villagers move

the articles from these to the cellars more artfully concealed. It was well on into the night before this work was finished.

Two men, sent to inquire about the village by district chief Tsow in Second *Hsiang*, halloosed for Shih Defu from the south hill. Shih Defu went up to parley with them. The hills near Chenchuan in the west and Wulungpu in the east were lit with strings of flaming dots. These were the campfires of the enemy. Night makes distance look shorter, and from Shajya Village, midway between these two towns, the enemy appeared to be very close by. Shih Defu and the two men tried to calculate in just what places were the enemy encamped. . . .

The three of them descended into the village when Carpenter shouted to Shih Defu that he had returned. Everyone was delighted to hear of the arrival of the Field Army and of the preparation for battle. Shih Defu remembered Secretary Jin saying that pretty soon the enemy would never be so cocky again. The regional militia leaders had evidently told him that the Field Army was coming. . . .

"Good!" Shih Defu clenched his fists hard. He was very aroused. "They're busy in those villages; we'll do our best here! Now we'll see whether Stinker Huai-tsung gets to be district chief! Now we'll see who eats those eighty odd piculs of grain!"

The men from Second *Hsiang* happily set out to report the good news to district chief Tsow. Shih Defu told Orchid, Phoenix and the other women to help with the cooking. As soon as the men Carpenter had mobilized arrived, they would begin issuing grain. . . .

XIV

This was the most hectic day of all.

As it turned light in the east, Shih Defu and the others were eating breakfast in the district office. Suddenly the whole village was thrown into an uproar. Some of the villagers still hadn't returned to their hide-outs, and they ran about confusedly. Everywhere rose the cry, "The enemy is coming!"

The eaters flung down their bowls, snatched up their packages, ration bags and parcels, and dashed out of the compound gate. Panting, Old Chen came running up to report: about a dozen enemy cavalymen had already galloped up the flat road in the big gorge and had continued on past the village. Pa Hu said they were the enemy's cavalry scouts. There was no doubt about it—enemy troops would be coming to Shajya Village earlier than they had the day before.

Shih Defu shouted for Carpenter to go up the hill and stand watch. He ordered Phoenix and Orchid to return to their little mountain hamlet at once. It was almost dawn. The first group of peasants arrived to draw grain.

At eight a.m. they were still issuing grain. The situation was getting tenser by the minute. Enemy planes had already made their appearance, also earlier than the day before. Leaning on his staff, the white-bearded old man came to the grain station and urged them to leave immediately. Shih Yungkung was trembling with fear. His hands shook so that he was totally unable to record the figures. Planes were the inevitable foreshadows of the enemy's foot soldiers. A few moments later, shouting, Carpenter came running down from his observation post. The handful of peasants still waiting to draw grain waited no longer. They disappeared in a flash.

The cadres closed down the grain station in the same manner as the previous day, then moved out quickly. By the time they reached the mouth of the ravine, the enemy had entered the other end of the village. Carpenter's long legs took him in a quick dash through the village to the gorge, but Shih Defu, Shih Yungkung and Pa Hu saw that they couldn't make it. Engulfing the little street like a tidal wave, enemy troops had cut them off to the north. Shih Defu promptly wheeled and led the cadres to the southern hills. His idea was as a last resort to join up with district chief Tsow's guerillas in Second *Hsiang*. But after traversing two hills, they found the gorge athwart their route to the south also filled with enemy soldiers, whose vanguard had already reached the top of Wujya Hill. Sandwiched in between the two gorges, they were confined to a stretch of hills only three *li* wide. They couldn't cross the north gorge and keep an eye on the grain station, nor could they reach the guerillas in the south. If the enemy should decide to come up these hills, the cadres' only hope would be to hide in some crevice.

At this point even Pa Hu began to get worried; he said they couldn't stay where they were. Shih Yungkung could only pant breathlessly and beg Shih Defu to find a hole in which they could conceal themselves. There were many such places in the hills, but Shih Defu didn't think the time had come yet for anything so desperate. He kept looking all around, trying to find some other way out. The enemy had divided into two columns, and this one in the southern gorge already was climbing the hills. Shih Defu thought it probable they had learned that the Field Army was moving south and were afraid their road from Chenchuan to Wulungpu would be cut; that to prevent this, they were moving into high positions midway along the highway. That being the case, by burying themselves in a hole the cadres might miss the opportunity to break out. Pa Hu agreed with Shih Defu's conjectures. Dragging Shih Yungkung along, they pushed toward the east where the distance between the two gorges was wider and at least they wouldn't be so close to the enemy. Then they could decide on the next step.

They covered four hills without a pause. The ridge on which they stopped afforded a good view of the north. Shih Defu's analysis had been correct. The enemy had passed on beyond Shajya Village and was climbing the high Changgow Hill.

Shortly before noon, from Changgow Hill came the chattering of machineguns; rifles popped like roasting beans on a griddle; interspersed was the crump, crump of mortar fire. Temporary district headquarters in Fifth *Hsiang* was right down the north slope of that hill. There was no need to guess—the enemy and our Field Army had begun their engagement.

Shih Defu told Pa Hu to keep watch from the ridge, while he and Shih Yungkung stayed in a corn field and noted the final grain issues in the account books. Considering the dangerous position they were in, plus the fact that the fate of the grain was still undecided, to Shih Yungkung's mind Shih Defu was being over meticulous. Uneasily, he watched Shih Defu unwrapping the books. He had no alternative but to take up his pen and make the entries, one by one. Just as they finished and the books were again being wrapped up, the firing on Changgow Hill diminished, then stopped completely. Joining Pa Hu on the ridge, they could see the enemy troops from Wujya Hill climbing the paths up Changgow Hill; north of the highway, other forces were also heading in that direction. The latter unquestionably belonged to the Field Army. Both sides were manoeuvring. . . .

Shih Defu couldn't forget the grain station. With the other two men, he mounted to higher ground and looked toward the west. The hill south of Shajya Village, and the hill with the little hamlet north of the gorge highway both were covered with troops. But because the enemy and our Field Army both wore nearly the same color uniforms, at a distance of three or four *li* it was impossible to make out which side was which. If our Field Army forces were on the hill north of the highway and Hu Tsung-nan's men were on the hill to the south, since they were separated only by the gorge, Shih Defu wondered why hadn't even a single shot been fired? He talked it over with Pa Hu. Pa Hu figured it this way: if both places were held by the Field Army's men, they were cutting off the enemy's retreat. Encirclement was a favorite tactics of the Field Army. If both heights were held by the enemy forces that definitely meant they had decided to use Shajya Village as a base. Stinker Huai-tsung and the enemy would have already taken over the grain station. This reasoning sounded correct to Shih Defu. Holding the account books, he turned and looked in all directions. The enemy were to the east and the south. North of the highway was the Field Army; the grain station was to the west. But it was precisely the situation in the west they couldn't be sure of.

"Let's go back two ridges to the west," he suggested, "and see who's actually holding those heights near Shajya Village. What do you say?"

"Let's go!" Pa Hu agreed. He pointed to a ridge. "From there we'll be able to make out who's holding that hill south of Shajya Village."

"Take it easy, you two. Don't be so rash," Shih Yungkung interposed quickly. "It's the enemy for sure! After Stinker reported in Chenchuan that our village has so much grain, after the enemy has come

in great number, do you mean to say they wouldn't want the grain? If we go to that ridge above Shajya Village and the enemy spots us won't we be just asking for trouble? Defu, what you said before is right. We ought to stay here for a while and see if we can get to the north side of the gorge. Our people are sure to be over there. . . ."

"I don't believe the enemy's got many men out here," said Shih Defu. He thought Shih Yungkung's fright was making him exaggerate the enemy's strength. He asked Pa Hu, "Would they pull all their troops out of Chenchuan and drop it? Would they come out here with their whole force?"

"Suppose both of you wait here while I go and have a look," Pa Hu offered. "One man makes a small target. Even if it is the enemy, it won't make any difference."

"I'll go," said Shih Defu. He handed the account books to Shih Yungkung. "Right now both sides are moving around in the Changgow Hill section. The enemy to the south won't come this way. If they do, there are some cliff caves further west. You can make a run for them. . . ."

"That's right. You let me go," Pa Hu said stubbornly. He gave his knapsack to Shih Yungkung and prepared to leave.

Shih Defu held him by the sleeve. They argued who should go; each had his reasons. Shih Defu was in charge of the grain station; besides, he was a Communist. He felt he should go personally to investigate the situation. But Pa Hu thought that as a former army man he shouldn't give way to someone who had only been a militiaman.

"You don't trust me, is that it?" he demanded.

Shih Defu decided he couldn't let Pa Hu think that, and they couldn't go off together and leave Shih Yungkung behind alone.

Still holding Pa Hu's sleeve, he said, "All right, but don't be too careless. Watch your step. If their hats or uniforms look like the enemy's, don't go any closer. . . ."

Shih Yungkung had the account books in one hand and the knapsack in the other; under his arms were the ration bag and vest which his mother had given him. Suddenly he shouted:

"Look! Look over there!"

A long thin column of brown-uniformed men was winding in an easterly direction.

"Who are they?"

Shih Yungkung rushed over between them. "They're not the Field Army. The Field Army is to the north. How could they be coming from the southwest?"

That was a question. Shih Defu and Pa Hu hesitated, then peered again to the west. All those troops that had been on the two hills north and south of Shajya Village were gone except for a few men stationed as outposts. Like the clouds in the sky, the soldiers had been in constant motion. You took your eye off them for a minute, and they disappeared.

The sudden appearance of troops to the southwest of Shajya Village made matters even more confused. How, actually, could the Field Army come south across the gorge? Could it have moved so fast? Or could the enemy have sent forces north up the Wuding River valley road from Sweideh to take over the occupation of Chenchuan so that the enemy in the latter city was able to bring out the entire Thirty-sixth Division for its eastward drive? Shih Defu recalled the talk he had with Jin two nights before, when the secretary told him of the enemy's scheme to surround and annihilate the Field Army. But that was all Shih Defu knew. He had no information about the plans of our forces. There was no use in making any snap judgments.

Pa Hu still wanted to go. Shih Defu considered this proposal as he surveyed the scene, but Shih Yungkung was unalterably opposed.

"You mustn't risk it," he begged. "If they're our forces, Carpenter and the girls are over there. Nothing will happen to the grain station. If they're the enemy, what good will seeing them do? We ought to wait and see how things stand this afternoon, then make up our minds. There are only three of us left. If we scatter we won't be able to get together again. We won't be able to talk things over together. . . ."

"Well then, what shall we do?" Pa Hu urged Shih Defu.

Shih Defu originally was going to let him go, but the near hysteria of Shih Yungkung gave him pause. If something should prevent Pa Hu from coming back and an emergency should develop, meeting it alone with Shih Yungkung really wouldn't be so good.

"We won't do anything now," he said finally, but the grain in Shajya Village was still on his mind. Who had it now—Carpenter, or Stinker Huai-tsung? . . .

Nearby was a watermelon patch belonging to a brother-in-law of Pa Hu. The ex-soldier picked two melons and divided it among the cadres to quench their thirst.

At noon the silence around Changgow Hill was broken. The booming of heavy artillery announced the commencement of a large-scale battle. Firing started first from the Field Army forces in Fifth *Hsiang*, immediately followed by the salvoes of the enemy on Changgow Hill. Planes appeared, artillery thundered. Column after column of black smoke of exploding shells mingled with the fine yellow dust shot aloft by the earth-rocking blasts, and together formed a murky curtain that blotted out a big portion of the sky. Planes darted in and out of this haze, spraying their machineguns against the hill side emplacements. On the slopes, machineguns, rifles and hand grenades blended into a gibbering roar. . . .

A column of enemy soldiers began moving up the hills to their east, and the cadres withdrew further west. They reached a little village which was completely deserted. The three men concealed themselves amid the crops of a field, and while watching the developments on Changgow Hill, conferred on a plan of action. They agreed that if the Field Army should

drive south across the gorge they themselves would take that opportunity to dash for the north side of the highway. Once there, they could inquire about the status of Shajya Village.

But all their bad luck seemed to be concentrated in this one day. A great rumbling of sound began rolling in from the south, echoing the artillery fire around Changgow Hill. Because their view was obscured by a high peak, at first they thought it was the commencement of another barrage, but soon they realized it was a thunderstorm.

The wind rose wild and blew dark tumbling clouds toward the northwest. Lightning flickered brightly through continuous thunder, and raindrops big as copper coins poured in sheets from the ominous sky, striking painfully against their faces. As the storm rose in fury, the artillery fire waned, then stopped completely. On Changgow Hill men and animals were dashing about. Disappointed, the cadres watched for a while, then headed for a small cave specially dug by the local peasants for shelter against the sudden mountain storms. The rain was coming down so heavily now that as they ran across the two ridges separating them from their destination, the cadres couldn't raise their heads.

They plunged into the cave shelter. Outside, through the leaden dimness, they could barely make out the crops on the hill slope driven flat against the ground by the pelting rain. Little rivulets sprang up everywhere; it was a cloudburst. The thunder, the swishing of the rain, the rushing mountain cataracts, combined into an infernal unroar. In the shelter, the cadres had to shout to make themselves heard.

Even before he paused to wipe the rain and perspiration from his face, Shih Defu tore open the account book package. Not bad. Because he had protected it with his body against the wind and rain, only some of the page edges were a bit damp. He wrung out the cloth which had enveloped the books and then re-wrapped them. With Pa Hu, he urged Shih Yungkung to put on his vest to ward against his delicate stomach taking a chill.

The cave shelter was so small that the men had to squat hunched over to fit into it. Through the torrential rain, they could see countless streams of muddy water racing down the hillside to turbulently join together in the ravines and gorges below.

"What are we going to do?" Shih Yungkung asked gloomily. He had put his vest on. "A big storm like this. Even when it stops, the water in the gorge won't go down right away. How can we get across the highway?"

"There's no use your grumbling every time we run into a little trouble. Let's do things step by step," said Shih Defu. "We're not so badly off in this cave. What about all those comrades in the Field Army? Where can they get out of the rain in the middle of a battle?"

"They'll be all right!" Sitting on his wet knapsack, Pa Hu laughed as he filled his pipe. With his usual unperturbed air, he shouted cheerfully, "Our local people are working as guides; they're sure to take them

into the villages. It's Hu Tsung-nan's men who are in a bad fix. They're up on the hills with their pack animals and equipment. Where can those bastards go in a hurry? They'll be sopping wet and won't have anything to eat. When this storm is over it'll be just the right time to finish them off. . . ." A clap of thunder drowned out the rest of his words.

Watching the pouring rain, Shih Defu could hazily picture the battlefield stretching from the Wuding to the Yellow River. The enemy occupied Sweideh and Hsia. The Field Army was lined up against Hu's Thirty-sixth Division in this region. Where was Chairman Mao during this big storm? Shih Defu remembered Secretary Jin telling him how important this battle was going to be. But just as it started, it was halted by the storm.

"It's hard. . . ." Shih Defu pulled out his short pipe and tamped in some tobacco. "It depends on how long the rain lasts. . . ."

The cadres ate Shih Yungkung's dry rations. The rain continued unabated until late in the afternoon, then stopped as suddenly as it had begun.

But the mountain streams and cataracts, if anything, seemed to roar even louder. Past experience had shown that after the sky cleared these waters usually raged as long as the storm itself, sometimes longer. Emerging from the shelter, the cadres found a sea of mud. Merely standing on the hill slope was difficult. They would have to wait till the water drained off and the ground became somewhat firmer before they could climb to a peak and have a look around.

At dusk they took off their shoes, rolled up their trousers, and slipped and skidded to a mountain knoll. The situation had changed radically. All along the range from Changgow Hill south to Wujya Hill was a wide row of yellow tents. It was as though a temple fair had been transported to the hilltops. Pack animals and troops could also be seen. These were the enemy forces. On the hills of Shajya Village and to the southwest of it there were only soldiers but no tents. Pa Hu said these were probably the men of the Field Army. In view of the present conditions, Shih Defu announced he definitely would have to take a closer look at Shajya Village.

"If you had let me go earlier," Pa Hu berated Shih Yungkung, "maybe we wouldn't have had to go running around blindly all day!"

"How could I know?" Shih Yungkung argued stubbornly. "Defu didn't want to go either. . . ."

"Only because you were so damn mulish!"

"Stop your quarreling," said Shih Defu. "It's getting dark. Let's go back and see."

It was hard going over the slippery ground. By the time they had traversed the two *li* along a winding path to the heights above the village, night had fallen. Suddenly, on the north slope a figure appeared coming toward them. Pa Hu shouted. It was Old Chen of the cooperative.

Holding a staff with one hand and carrying his shoes in the other, the old man was startled.

"Aiya! What are you doing here?"

They discovered that Chen had never reached the girls in the mountain hamlet. He had gone to see his wife in the cliff caves and then had stayed there because he couldn't get across the gorge. When the artillery started on Changgow Hill, he had climbed a hill to see the developments. The storm was much fiercer than he had expected; he was unable to return to the cliff caves and had to hide in a shelter cave all afternoon. Now, with the paths so slippery, getting back to the cliff caves was out of the question. He was taking advantage of the darkness to see what was happening in the village. . . .

"You've been close to here all the time. Couldn't you tell whose troops they are?" Shih Defu was surprised.

Old Chen sighed and shook his head. "Both sides moved around so fast it made my eyes blur. I couldn't tell one from the other."

"Now what do you think?" Shih Yungkung demanded of Pa Hu triumphantly.

Pa Hu was positive. "They're our men! Pluck out my eyes if I'm wrong! Do you think I can't even see that much?"

"Stop your wrangling. We'll go to the village and take a good look!" said Shih Defu.

The four men advanced.

On a rise less than two hundred paces from Shajya Village, they could see fires in the village reflecting red on the southern hill slope. But because of a thick growth of trees in front of them and the way the ravine twisted, the village itself was not visible. The cadres stood and listened intently. They could hear the noises of pack animals and the sound of men's voices. While they couldn't distinguish the words, the accents didn't sound like those of local people.

"Go slow," Old Chen advised calmly. "We can't hear what they're saying, and there are fires lit all over the village. It won't be wise to go barging in."

Shih Yungkung looked tensely at Shih Defu. The latter was conferring with Pa Hu.

"The enemy have set up their tents on the hills to the east. Is it because they know the Field Army is close after they've exchanged fire with it and are afraid to lose the hill tops if they come down into the gorge here?"

Pa Hu pondered silently. It was very strange. The troops in the village didn't sound like they arrived there before the storm. Then were they really enemy forces? In the darkness, the rushing mountain torrents howled like the wind, and overhead black clouds again gathered. Another rain storm might start at any minute.

Pa Hu growled an oath, trust his knapsack at Shih Defu and pulled out two hand grenades.

"All of you stay here while I have a look! If they're enemies and you hear these grenades go off, make for the shelter cave and wait for me there. . . ."

"No!" Shih Defu didn't trust Pa Hu's rashness. "I'll go and see how the land lies. But first we'll have Old Chen and Shih Yungkung move off with the account books. After that maybe you can use those grenades. . . ."

Old Chen disagreed. "Neither of you go. Let me take a look. I'm old. It doesn't matter whether I live or die. You've got the grain station records. If I'm captured, after the water goes down in the gorge, you can take them over to Secretary Jin. There are only a few dozen piculs of grain left in the village, but those records account for about a thousand already given out. Listen to me. Don't sacrifice the big for the small!"

Staff in hand, he began walking toward the ravine. Shih Defu took him by the arm.

"Dear Old Chen. . . ."

"We're wasting time talking!" The old man shook off Shih Defu's hand and staunchly strode away.

The three cadres looked admiringly after the bent figure disappearing into the night. The booming of the waters in the gorge was like solemn music playing a prelude to the old man's death. Whether Shajya Village contained the enemy or forces of the Field Army was of vital importance not only to the grain station but to the outcome of the entire battle. Old Chen was swallowed up by the twisting ravine.

Silently, the cadres waited. Shih Defu thought of how the old man had applied to join the Party. He vowed to sponsor him if they both should be alive when the fighting ended.

About five minutes later, they heard Old Chen's deliriously happy shout:

"Come down! They're ours! They're ours!"

The cadres sighed with relief, then practically flew into the ravine. There the ground was even more slippery than the slope, and they fell several times in their rush to see the grain station.

The village was filled with Field Army soldiers in brown uniforms. Campfires in the compounds, on the terraces, on the grass fields were surrounded by soldiers drying their clothing and equipment. The main street was as jammed as on a market day. Men were carrying bags of grain, obviously brought from the station. Old Chen was lost in the crowd. The cadres pushed ahead toward the station but found their road blocked by masses of soldiers and peasants. The latter were men from neighboring villages who were serving as guides to the Army.

"The Shajya Village people have come back," one of them called.

"They know the paths around these parts best . . ." said another.

Three soldiers promptly approached the cadres and questioned them. The cadres explained that they were in charge of the grain station. The soldiers were sceptical. Shih Defu showed them the account books and

the guides confirmed the Shajya Village cadres' identity. Just as the soldiers were about to let them proceed, two cadres with pistols strapped to their waists came over from the direction of the district office.

"Not so fast!" one of them shouted. "The army got here this morning, but we haven't seen a sign of any grain station people all day. Now the grain is almost all given out. What are you going to take charge of?"

"You shouldn't be so strict with the local cadres," the other man said. "The enemy came through here first. These people couldn't tell what was happening. They probably didn't dare to come back. . . ."

"That's exactly right!" Shih Defu was worried. "If the grain is handed out in a chaotic way, how can we make a proper account?"

The friendly cadre's voice was calm and unhurried. "Nothing will go wrong. We couldn't find you, so when the civilian porters arrived our quartermaster cadres distributed the grain. There's not much left now; you might as well let them finish the job. You men can act as guides." He turned to his companion. "These comrades are all doing excellent work. I hear that before they left, they straightened out the grain station spick and span. . . ."

"It's because we wanted to put things in order that we didn't get across to the north!" Pa Hu added.

Shih Defu persisted in his inquiry. "Comrade, after the grain is finished, will you give us the receipts?"

"We will." The cadre who originally had been so brusque changed his tone. "Your village administration clerk, a very tall fellow, is here. He said it would be all right to turn them over to him."

Of course, that must be Carpenter. Shih Defu was delighted. To Shih Yungkung and Pa Hu he shouted, "We'll be guides, then!"

"Right!" Pa Hu affixed his knapsack to his back as though ready to set out at once.

Shih Yungkung mumbled, "We haven't eaten all day. . . ."

"Have you forgotten what Secretary Jin said?" demanded Shih Defu sternly. "Communists are made of special stuff! If you hadn't been so scared, we could have come back this morning! Others had to give the grain out for us; there's nothing left for us to say. We'll be guides to the army even if we don't eat! You can't sit back and leave everything to the army. Even Chairman Mao doesn't want the Field Army to protect him!"

The army cadres completely approved Shih Defu's words. The one who had asked them to be guides added, "Whatever unit you're attached to will feed you. We haven't eaten since early this morning either. . . ."

Shih Defu, Shih Yungkung and Pa Hu were then assigned to three different units. Shortly afterwards, men came to bring them to their respective groups. Shih Defu went off with a comrade toward the gorge. Halfway through the ravine, he met Phoenix, followed by several soldiers. Oddly enough, she recognized him a good distance away, though she could only see him faintly in the light of a nearby campfire.

"Defu," she called, "where have you been? I'm taking these comrades to your house to get some bottles of cooking oil out of your cellar. . . ."

Ah, how she laughed—contentedly (because Shih Defu had finally returned), proudly (because she was carrying out her promise to help the army). And before he had a chance to reply, she was gone around a bend in the ravine. What satisfaction this chance meeting gave to Shih Defu! Only then did he realize that he actually hadn't thought of her all day! Apparently Carpenter and the girls in the mountain hamlet had come back. But the people in the cliff caves were still cut off by the mountain torrents. Shih Defu's mother was among them. . . .

With the army comrade, he entered the gorge. Reflecting the glow of the campfires, the turbulently flowing river tossed with whitecaps. Everywhere were soldiers, mules, and oilcloth covered equipments. Shih Defu was led into what had been the village's little stone restaurant. A number of cadres were crowded around a military map which they were discussing in the light of two candles.

Outside, the rain began to fall again.

XV

That day, the Field Army had deployed its forces like this: the Third Column, together with the Fourth and Sixth Regional Militia Regiments, was lined up west of the enemy's 123rd Brigade near Wulungpu; the Second Column, the Model Brigade and the New Fourth Brigade were concentrated near Changgow Hill to annihilate the enemy's 165th Brigade which was driving east after having gone through Shajya Village; the First Column occupied Shajya Village and a wide stretch running ten *li* to the west along the big gorge, thus cutting the escape route of the division headquarters of the Thirty-sixth Division and the 165th Brigade, at the same time preventing the enemy regiment still in Chenchuan from linking up with the main enemy forces. The storm had stopped the battle before it could be fought to a finish. Moreover, the mountain torrents which resulted, isolated from one another various units of the First Column in the hills and villages in and around Shajya Village.

The torrents diminished very slowly; then, at night there was another shower, and they rose again. It was pitch black. The yellow soil of the tortuous mountain paths became such mud bogs that any movement of troops was impossible. Those soldiers who had come to Shajya Village first escaped the rain in caves and houses; some of the later arrivals squeezed under the mule and ox shelters. But the vast majority simply had to take it under the open sky. The downpour had put out all the campfires, but every so often a flash of lightning would reveal dripping soldiers standing quietly in the rain.

Fortunately, the storm passed quickly. The village again turned into a noisy hive of activity. Units on the surrounding heights sent men to

cook food on the Shajya Village stoves. Carpenter, Phoenix, Orchid and Old Chen kept running around helping the troops find things they needed. It was well past midnight before the village gradually quieted down. The skies cleared; the mountain torrents shrunk. Everyone waited for the order to go into action.

When the rain had washed out the battle on Changgow Hill and Hu's Thirty-sixth Division discovered they were confronted by the superior Field Army, they dropped everything and spent the whole night concentrating their strength. They pilfered blankets and mattresses from the peasants' homes and spread them on the slippery mountain paths to give themselves footholds. Entire companies were swept away by the rushing waters while crossing streams, but even this did not stop the 123rd Brigade from pulling back from near Wulungpu and rushing west to link up with the rest of the enemy forces. Hu Tsung-nan's officers forced their men at pistol point to join arms and cross the racing streams. Cursing, they mercilessly pushed the men into the raging torrents.

This mad dashing about on the part of the enemy was impelled by the revelation that they were in danger of being isolated into small units and then being destroyed piecemeal. The five and a half brigades trailing Chairman Mao and the Central Committee had failed to rendezvous with the Thirty-sixth Division. Instead, they were sixty *li* south of Wulungpu, on the banks of the Yellow River. This large force of enemy soldiers had reacted exactly as Chairman Mao, now near Hsia, anticipated they would. As a result, the Field Army had the wily Thirty-sixth Division right in the palm of its big hand!

Before dawn, the First Column received orders to split up and move back north of the gorge. The storm had soaked the equipment; men and animals were exhausted. They had to have some rest before they would be fit to fight again. When all the units had gathered at the assembly point, it was announced that since the Column was returning to the other side of the gorge, those guides who had been engaged to lead the way south of the highway would no longer be needed.

Shih Defu stood with the account books under his arm at the former fair grounds and took leave of the battalion to which he had been attached. He had spent the night with the men of the battalion, and already was their good friend. After the commander learned that Shih Defu had been in a stretcher team with the Field Army for three months, besides being a strong young man who was a clever and able Party member, he became very fond of Shih Defu. He was sure his troops would soon be coming south across the gorge again to fight, and he wanted Shih Defu to stay with them. But Shih Defu said he had to straighten out the grain station records; there was nothing to do but leave him behind. The battalion political instructor placed both his hands on Shih Defu's shoulders and gave him some last minute advice.

"Comrade, the enemy to the east and west are all going to converge

in this region. Once we leave, you'd better straighten out your books fast and get to a safe place. . . ."

"I know," Shih Defu nodded. Carrying his books, he walked rapidly away.

As the sky began to lighten, the village was full of moving men and horses. Where could he find Carpenter at a time like this? He decided to take a look at the grain station.

The station had long since been vacated. Though Shih Defu could see in the dim recesses of the storerooms that all the grain had been issued, grain spilled on the floor had not yet been swept together. Walking about the station, Shih Defu estimated he still could sweep up another picul. The army comrades had been in too much of a rush to have had time to sweep, but he was in charge of the station; how could he let this grain go to waste? He ran back toward the ground where the troops had assembled, hoping to find Shih Yungkung and Pa Hu and get their help.

"Defu, I was just looking for you," Carpenter came down the stone-flagged slope from the district office. "They want to give an ordinary receipt. . . ."

"Why?"

"The quartermaster seal isn't here. If we want a formal receipt, I have to go with them to get it."

"How about the figures? What's the total?"

"Sixty-five piculs. I don't remember the fraction."

"Right." The total was approximately correct. Shih Defu spoke fast, "You go with them to get an official receipt. We can still sweep up another picul at the station. I'll do it with Shih Yungkung and Pa Hu, and we'll hide it!"

Carpenter strode toward the district office, then turned back and snouted, "Defu! Defu! The grain porters who came last night are all from our district. The men from our village who went to the front are all here!"

"That's fine!" Shih Defu called over his shoulder. "I've got no time to talk to you now!"

"There's something important," Carpenter caught up and whispered. "One of them brought word that he saw Secretary Jin. He said our district office has moved to Aijya Ditch. Secretary Jin wants all of you to go there when you've finished. He's got work for you. . . ."

"Good," Shih Defu nodded. He trotted off toward the gorge.

The troops were nearly all gone. A large group of people were gathered outside the big gate of the co-op compound. The old folks, women and children had come back from the cliff caves. They had learned that our forces were in the village, but returned only in time to see the troops depart. Talking excitedly, they said they had passed the boulder-strewn river flats and had seen the shorts-clad corpses of the Hu Tsung-nan soldiers who had been swept down by the mountain tor-

rents. Phoenix's father had picked up an army helmet. The top of it was caked with mud.

Old Chen urged the villagers not to go to their homes, but to return at once to the cliff caves. The enemy was very close at hand. Once our forces left, the enemy could arrive much quicker than they had two days before....

"Have you seen our other two men?" Shih Defu asked him.

"Pa Hu went off with the troops. Shih Yungkung is talking with his mother at the end of the village," said one of the by-standers.

Old Chen could see that Shih Defu was in a rush. He asked quickly, "What's wrong? Hasn't the grain all been given out? What do you want them for? That young Pa Hu is too careless...."

Shih Defu had no time to answer. He flew to the end of the village. He was afraid Shih Yungkung's mother would talk him into going to the hiding place of his wife and children. The villagers watched Shih Defu tearing away with the books under his arm. None of them had any confidence in him when he first took over the grain station. Now he was bringing the job to a successful conclusion....

Thinking of how bold but steady Shih Defu had been these past few days, how he had subordinated all his own personal interests to those of the public good, Old Chen couldn't help saying, with a sigh, "It wasn't easy! He stood firm no matter what happened. His selfless spirit of 'everything for the revolution' is really something wonderful!"

One of the other villagers remarked that on the day of the big rain Shih Defu's mother had gotten chilled and became very ill. She groaned all night and kept calling for him.

Shih Defu reached the end of the village in practically one breath. Shih Yungkung was indeed talking with his mother, and she was indeed urging him to take refuge with his wife and children in another village. But Shih Yungkung had been insisting that he had to discuss this with Shih Defu first. "I'm a Party member," he told his mother, "not like Pa Hu; but Pa Hu himself has gone with the Field Army as a guide." Because Shih Defu had criticized him the night before, Shih Yungkung's expression became a bit strained when he saw him running up.

"Quick!" Shih Defu shouted. "There's still a picul of grain scattered on the station floor. We two have to sweep it together and hide it."

Shih Yungkung's mother asked, "Where will you go when you've finished?"

"Secretary Jin sent word for us to go to Aijya Ditch. There's work for us," Shih Defu said hurriedly. He urged the old lady, "Please don't worry about him any more. You just look after yourself. We men can run much faster than you when we have to." Then, to Shih Yungkung he said, "Hurry up. Today is different than last time. We can't afford to delay one second!"

"Ma," Shih Yungkung said agitatedly, "then you go back to the family."

"No. If you won't go with me to their village, I'll hide out in the cliff caves...." The old lady sighed faintly. She wanted to leave Shih Defu a few instructions on how to take care of her son, but he obviously had no time to listen to her....

By now, the last of the Field Army troops had left Shajya Village. Carpenter went with them, saying that after he got the formal receipt for the grain, he would await Shih Defu and the other cadres in Aijya Ditch. The old folks, women and children were congregated in front of the cooperative's gate. When they saw that the troops were all gone, they departed in groups for the cliff caves. Some of them told Shih Defu that his mother was sick, but that she was being looked after. They suggested that if he had time, he should go and visit her. Shih Defu's entire mind was intent on sweeping up the grain. He didn't even pause long enough to ask the details of his mother's illness; he listened abstractedly for a moment, then walked on.

Orchid, Phoenix, and a number of other young women were conferring with Old Chen, also outside the cooperative, as they waited for a word with Shih Defu before returning to the mountain hamlet.

The sky was quite bright now. With the Field Army gone, Shajya Village had again become a danger spot.

When Shih Defu announced that he and Shih Yungkung were going to sweep up the grain station, the girls immediately insisted on going along to help. They all started talking at once:

"The more hands, the faster it's done. We'll finish it up and leave together...."

This prospect was very pleasing to Shih Yungkung; he looked at Shih Defu. The latter stared at these young, dear girls, then said firmly:

"We don't want you! If the enemy shows up, you won't be able to run fast enough. It's too risky! The more people, the bigger the target. Just the two of us can get around much easier." To Old Chen he said, "Pa Hu has left. Could you keep a lookout for us on the north hill?"

The old man was so thrilled he couldn't answer for some time. With such a big battle going on, he thought, what difference would it make if they didn't sweep up that last picul of grain? If anything should go wrong they might be in a hopeless situation. But seeing how determined Shih Defu was, he knew nothing he would say could do any good.

"All right, then, give me the account books. You go, now!"

As Shih Defu handed the package to Old Chen, Phoenix took him by the sleeve. For the first time in public she looked at him longingly.

"We'll be waiting for you in the mountain hamlet...."

Shih Defu and Shih Yungkung went off to the ravine. Halfway through, they again met the white-bearded old man.

"Now what else are you here for?" he demanded.

But Shih Defu only waved toward the grain station and urged Shih Yungkung to hurry. They reached the station and swept the grain into

a pile, as the sun ascended to the hill tops. Enemy planes appeared; the sound of machinegunning could be heard in the sky. The old man was worried about them staying so long in the grain station. Leaning on his staff he slowly mounted to the door of the cave.

"Children, don't you want to live? Leave, quickly!"

"Let's go," said Shih Yungkung uneasily. He paused with a wicker scoop in his hands.

"Keep working!" Shih Defu insisted, scooping up grain like a machine and dumping it in a basket. "Old man, please go down. We've got someone keeping watch for us on the north hill."

The two cadres carried the filled basket to a concealed cellar in a neighboring courtyard, and poured in the grain. They emptied basket after basket; finally, they even concealed the station's equipment.

The job was finished, but the danger was about to come.

By the time Old Chen and the girls shouted that enemy forces coming from the west had entered the upper gorge, it was already too late. Enemy troops also appeared in the lower gorge from the east, and soldiers topping the southern heights began firing with a machinegun at Old Chen and the girls on the opposite north hill. Shih Defu and Shih Yungkung sealed the cellar and ran toward the center of the ravine. Hearing the enemy in the gorge, they whirled and headed into a gully of castor oil plants. Shih Defu let Shih Yungkung take the lead. They planned to follow the gully to where it met another ravine further down, and there cross the ravine and go north. But when they reached the mouth of the gully, the enemy was already coming up the ravine from the east. As Shih Yungkung dashed out, he was greeted by a burst of rifle fire. He immediately drew back.

"One rush and you're over!" Shih Defu pushed him, wanting to get Shih Yungkung out of danger first. "Get across fast and keep running!"

Shih Yungkung scooted like a rabbit and got safely across. But this made the enemy bring their machinegun into play, and now the mouth of the gully was sealed tight. Shih Defu was stuck. He pulled back and plunged into a patch of castor oil plants. Then he spotted a cave shelter built as a refuge from the mountain storms, high up one of the steep side of the gully. He scrambled into it and re-arranged the thick mass of vines overgrowing its opening. Enemy troops were marching on the ridge directly over his head.

"There aren't any soldiers," he heard one of them yelling hoarsely. "Just some peasant making a run for it!..."

"Keep moving, you men!"

Apparently their main job was to get into positions against the Field Army. They wouldn't take time off to come down into the gully and search for him. Shih Defu put the grenades he had tightly clenched in his hands back into his pocket, and settled himself more comfortably. Peering through the vines, he could see the enemy crossing the mouth of the gully and climbing the opposite ridge. They were wearing American

style service caps and shorts. Their faces and legs had been burned black by the sun; they really looked outlandish and Shih Defu even hated their appearance. Then he heard troops and animals thudding above his head. The enemy was rounding the ridge and moving on toward Shajya Village.

The extent of enemy activity far exceeded anything Shih Defu had imagined. None of the comrades in the Field Army battalion he spent the night with knew he planned to sweep up the grain station (in fact, he hadn't known it himself), and so they didn't tell him in any detail how heavy the enemy drive might be. That this was a big enemy operation might have been induced, however, from the fact that the First Column had deemed it wiser not to meet the enemy pincers from east and west alone, and to withdraw to north of the gorge for rest and re-organization. Occupying Changgow Hill was the enemy 123rd Brigade which had pulled back from Wulungpu; to the south was the division headquarters unit of the Thirty-sixth Division; the enemy 165th Brigade was moving west to link up with the regiment coming out from Chenchuan. In other words, Shajya Village was surrounded. From within the cave shelter, Shih Defu, listening to the enemy movement and to the sound of near and distant firing, was able to evolve a rough idea of the general picture.

He had no regrets whatsoever at having remained behind to sweep up the grain. He was happy that Shih Yungkung had gotten away, and prayed that he would reach Aijya Ditch safely. He hoped, also, that Old Chen and the girls would get back to their mountain hamlet without mishap, without having to run through any enemy machinegun fire. And himself?

"Being the only one left, it will be easy to manage," Shih Defu said meditatively. Even if he had to sit it out till dark, he would find some way of getting across.

The cave was quite muddy as a result of the previous day's rain; it was dark and damp. Shih Defu had run in perspiring heavily. He was all right at first, but gradually he began to feel cold. He would be sure to get sick if he stayed in that hole too long. Moreover this was the height of the rainy season. The little cave wouldn't be much of a shelter against a real storm.

After a while, the noise of the men and animals walking on the ridge above him died away. He parted the vines and looked out. The ridge opposite was deserted too. If he could get back into the gully and follow it to the ravine, he might eventually be able to get to the gorge and across. Because Secretary Jin had sent word that there was work waiting for him, he decided to risk it.

Shih Defu crawled out of the cave, took out his two grenades, and hooked a finger of each hand through the loops of the firing pin strings. He slid back down into the gully, and ran, crouching, through the waist-high tangled patch of castor oil plants.

Running, running! With only a dozen paces left from the mouth

of the gully, he suddenly heard a shout from the ridge above and to his rear.

"Who's there?"

"We'll shoot if you run!"

From the sound, there were only two or three of them. Shih Defu took a deep breath and sprinted toward higher ground near the mouth of the gully, noisily scattering castor beans in his wake. His main thought now was not to get out of the gully but to reach a level where he could cope with the enemy on better terms.

A rifle cracked behind him, once. Shih Defu whirled, drew back his arm, and a heavy black object sailed through the air and landed on the ridge in front of his pursuers. The two Hu Tsung-nan soldiers who were in the lead froze stupidly for a second, then turned and scrambled in panic, spoiling the aim of the third soldier, just then drawing a bead on Shih Defu. Shifting the remaining grenade from his left to his right hand, Shih Defu was ready to fling it, when the one on the ridge exploded. A great cloud of dust and smoke seemed to spring out of the very ground, obliterating the three soldiers. . . .

Shih Defu released his breath, then leaped down into the ravine. Now he followed the shortest and most direct route, disregarding the regular path. He saw a shoe which Shih Yungkung had lost in his flight a few paces to one side, but didn't pause to pick it up. His only worry was that the enemy would pursue him and shoot from behind before he could have a chance to fight back.

But when the next shot came, it was from a rise ahead of him. A bullet ripped through the loose sleeve of his shirt, and Shih Defu saw the enemy soldier ramming another cartridge into the breech of his rifle. Shih Defu immediately threw his last grenade, bent forward and raced on. He had already jumped down a small embankment by the time it went off, and could no longer be seen from where the soldier had been standing.

Here the ravine became very deep and narrow. Shih Defu could hear the voices of enemy soldiers high up along the hill slopes. He was empty-handed now; he couldn't afford to stop for any reason.

Shih Defu ran steadily through the twisting ravine for about two *li*. His whole body was drenched in perspiration that soaked through his clothes. Thirst burned like fire in his throat and stomach. When he felt he had left danger far enough behind, he scooped some muddy water from a puddle and drank. A lovely coolness enveloped him. Standing up, he wiped the sweat from his face, neck and chest. He looked carefully around at all the landmarks. The big gorge wasn't much further.

He slowed his pace to a walk, and began considering just where to cross the gorge. Which path was closest, the most concealed? If he should meet any more of the enemy, what would be the best means of flight?

"Don't move!"

As Shih Defu turned a corner of the narrow ravine, there were two enemy plain clothes men right in front of him, their pistols pointing at his chest. Shih Defu sighed. So he couldn't escape them after all.

They searched him from head to foot, but only produced his short pipe and a tobacco pouch which Phoenix had embroidered and slipped him surreptitiously when he had gone off with the stretcher teams, and a box of matches. All were in a worn and battered condition. They examined his hands and feet—covered with thick calli. They removed his white towel turban and looked at his forehead—there was no tell-tale line that comes from long wearing of an army cap.

"Peasant. Young. Make a good recruit," the shorter plain clothes man grinned, revealing repulsive false teeth made of brass.

"Turn him over to company headquarters for questioning. We still have to scout."

"Finished!" the defenseless Shih Defu said to himself. He was beginning to get worried. "What'll I do if they put an enemy soldier's uniform on me?..." As they led him up the slope, his fingers were busy re-tying his turban, but his brain was quickly preparing a story.

The eastern face of the mountain ridge was covered with men in khaki uniforms. Shih Defu couldn't understand a word they were jabbering. On the plateau to the south, many pack animals laden with gun barrels and baggage were grazing on young growing millet. A long snaking line of enemy soldiers, coming from the direction of Shajya Village's south hill, was blocked by the mass of feeding animals. On this side, columns of enemy soldiers were cutting through fields of crops to climb toward the peak, which was the highest in the neighborhood and formed a triangle with Wujya and Changgow Hills. Shih Defu could hazily make out some men already on the peak, peering toward the north through field glasses. They appeared to be officers.

Shih Defu's captors led him higher. Now he could see the whole range south of the big gorge. Every bit of it was occupied by enemy soldiers.

When they reached the ridge, the two plain clothes men left. Shih Defu found himself gradually surrounded by a bunch of enemy soldiers. The sergeant began to question him.

"Where you from?"—Baijya Gully.

"What do you do?"—Shepherd.

"Where are your sheep?"—Drowned by a torrent during the storm.

"Where were you running to?"—No place. Just running....

"Nonsense!" A savage-looking soldier with a service cap cocked over one eye spat contemptuously. He pushed the cap to the back of his head. "A pack of lies! This guy's too sure, too steady!"

The sergeant stopped him. "What's your hurry?" He continued with his questions, even more calmly than Shih Defu.

"You're a shepherd. Why should you run?"—Afraid.

"Afraid of who?"—Afraid of you soldiers.

"You don't have to be scared of us. Work for us as a guide."—We don't know these parts so well.

"How far is Baijya Gully from here?"—About ten *li*.

"About ten *li* and you don't know your way around?" The sergeant's cruel eyes were sceptical.

"I know the roads, but not the back country."

"This guy has got an answer for everything!" snorted one of the listeners.

"Put a uniform on him and let him start work!"

By then, the animals blocking the path had been led to one side, and most of the soldiers surrounding Shih Defu fell back into formation and marched on. Only about a dozen sun-blackened men remained. The sergeant pointed at a sack of grain.

"Let him carry that," he said to a corporal, "and take him to work on the fortifications. Give him a uniform tonight."

Shih Defu glanced at the sack. It was bulging heavy with grain. Judging from its many careful patches, it evidently had been stolen from some peasant. Two soldiers lifted the sack on to Shih Defu's shoulders and escorted him down the slope.

As Shih Defu trudged with his burden, the recollection of a contemptible figure flashed through his mind, a man who had been captured by the enemy during the Land Revolution and turned traitor. Because he feared for his life, the man had helped the enemy. In the winter of 1943, he confessed at an anti-traitor mass rally. Over ten thousand people spat and reviled at him. Shih Defu had been among the first to raise his arm again and again while shouting political slogans. He hated the traitor so that he had wanted to rush from the crowd on to the platform and smash the shameless wretch. And now, he himself was carrying grain for the enemy!

Pangs of shame gripped his young honest heart. Was he docilely going to help the enemy build fortifications too? He thought of the solemn kindly face of the district Party secretary, and his ears rang with Jin's final words:

"Communists are made of special stuff. . . ."

"No!" In his heart, Shih Defu made a vow to the distant Secretary Jin: "I'm not afraid to die! Though I've done my best, I've fallen into the enemy's hands. But they won't get a word out of me; when the time comes, I'll fight them to the end! If I live, I want to be able to look you in the eye; if I die, I'll do it in a way to bring honor to the Party!"

Shih Defu and his captors descended the slope toward the long column of enemy troops which had detoured around Shajya Village's south hill. With the pack animals out of the way, the troops resumed their march. They were led by a civilian. Shih Defu was deep in thought, planning how to make the enemy pay for his life dearly, when he was startled by a familiar voice.

"Hey! That's Shih Defu from Shajya Village! Why haven't you shot him?"

"Enemies are bound to meet," according to the old saying. Shih Defu raised his head and stared. It was Stinker Huai-tsung. Shih Defu's eyes shot fire. He could fool the Hu Tsung-nan soldiers no longer. He dropped his grain sack, and before the soldiers could stop him, flung himself at the hated landlord. Unfortunately, Shih Defu was without a weapon, but he managed to punch Stinker's face in a way to bring blood spurting from the landlord's nose before he was overwhelmed by a gang of enemy soldiers.

"Drag him over there and tie him up!" The sergeant's beady eyes seemed ready to jump out of their sockets.

Shih Defu was hauled to one side, while a group of soldiers crowded around Stinker. Shih Defu could hear the latter bawling something hoarsely. But now his hands were tied before him while his upper arms were pinned behind his back. He could only turn his neck and glare with loathing in the landlord's direction.

Tightly trussed, Shih Defu was pulled to a ploughed field east of the plateau. Stinker and the troops to whom he was playing guide went on their way. The enemy sergeant came striding over with a wide leather belt in his hand.

"So you're a Communist!" The sergeant bared his teeth in a snarl, and whipped the belt down on Shih Defu's head. "Are you a shepherd?"

"Since you know, why ask me?" said Shih Defu coldly.

"Good!" yelled the sergeant. He ordered two soldiers to cut some mulberry switches, then described to the other soldiers just what sort of a man Shih Defu was. Listening, their jaws dropped in amazement.

The switches were cut and given to four men, on the sergeant's directions. Shih Defu was forced face down on the ground, while two men stood on each side and flailed him with the switches. At first the pain was like being cut with hot knives. Shih Defu gritted his teeth and held on. Before long, his perspiration had soaked through his thin clothes; his back and buttocks felt paralyzed. One thing was clear: his short life would soon be ended!

The four soldiers beat him till their arms hung exhausted by their sides. The sergeant raised Shih Defu's deathly white face with his foot. Shih Defu's head was dripping with perspiration.

"Now will you talk, now will you talk, now will you talk!" The sergeant's voice rose to a scream.

Shih Defu didn't utter a sound. He wanted to curse the enemy, but he didn't have the strength. The sergeant ordered the beating to continue. A corporal suggested to shoot him and be done with it. The sergeant wouldn't listen.

"I want to see how tough he is!"

Again the switches rang through the air. Shih Defu's swollen flesh was beginning to split and bleed. They could kill him, but he wouldn't

cry out! Just then, the two plain clothes men who had caught him came running up.

"Get going, fast! There's enemy movement north of Shajya Village!"

"What are you getting excited about? We've got troops on the hills around Shajya Village."

"Our troops have been ordered to pull out and come this way!"

The plain clothes men turned and rushed up the slope. Instantly, the enemy squad was in an uproar. Again the corporal demanded that Shih Defu be shot; again the sergeant refused.

"That would be letting him off too easy!" His little eyes gleamed at the prostrate form. "Take him along. We'll let him dig fortifications...."

XVI

When Old Chen and the girls had stood guard on the hill northwest of Shajya Village for the men in the grain station, they too were in great danger. They assumed that as on the previous two days the enemy would again come from the west. Much to their surprise, the enemy suddenly began converging toward them from three directions—east, west and south. Fortunately, the sorghum field in which they were standing gave them good concealment. They got safely across the ridge without being hit by the enemy machineguns, and soon reached the mountain hamlet.

Everyone bemoaned the bad luck of Shih Defu and Shih Yungkung. Old Chen said if he had thought things were going to turn out this way, he would have insisted that Shih Defu forget about that last picul of grain, whether Shih Defu liked it or not. Phoenix could see the beloved image of Shih Defu floating before her big tear-dimmed eyes. Only by a great effort was she able to prevent herself from weeping openly. Orchid and the other girls comforted her. Shih Defu had been at the front, he had experience, they said. He probably managed to cross the gorge with Shih Yungkung further down, and had reached Aijya Ditch.

By noon, there was still no sign of Shih Defu. Old Chen clasped the account books under his arm, took up his staff and headed for Aijya Ditch. Phoenix was already beyond caring what others might say, or what her parents hiding in the cliff caves would do when they found out. She told Orchid and the girls to wait for her—she was going to Aijya Ditch with Old Chen. A world without Shih Defu was something she couldn't bear to think about....

They found Aijya Ditch jammed with Field Army soldiers. Even the temple and its outdoor stage were occupied. After considerable difficulty, they managed to locate Old Wang and Carpenter, both of whom were very worried about Shih Defu and Shih Yungkung. After Carpenter had picked up the grain receipt, and hours passed without the men appearing, he knew something had gone wrong. Old Wang figured Shih

Defu was resting in the mountain hamlet. Shih Defu had labored so hard to finish his dangerous job. He was only human; why shouldn't he rest? Or perhaps he had some instructions to give to Phoenix and the girls.

"Does he know that Secretary Jin has work for him?"

"He knows. I told him," Carpenter said, and he disagreed with Old Wang's guess. "Defu isn't like that. He is always straight. He wouldn't even go to see his mother though he knows she's sick. At a time like this he wouldn't be hanging around with Phoenix."

The arrival of Old Chen and Phoenix confirmed Carpenter's worst fears. He clapped his hands together in anguish, and looked at Old Wang. Old Chen told them what had happened. It was now clear that Shih Defu was neither in the mountain hamlet nor in Aijya Ditch. What reason did they have for hope?

Phoenix broke down and wept. Then she swallowed her sobs, and when she spoke her voice was hoarse but confident.

"He's so strong. He'd die before he'd let the Party lose face!"

Old Wang sighed. "But what about Shih Yungkung? A wife, a mother, a bunch of kids! Even in ordinary times he's always thinking about them. If he got into a tough spot. . . ."

"We don't have to worry about that yet," said Carpenter. "There's no use talking about things before they happen!"

What to do? To search for the two or rescue them was out of the question. District Party secretary Jin and district clerk Shang had long since been transferred by Commissioner Geh to Cedar Rise. Finally, Carpenter gave the grain receipt to Old Chen and told him to deliver it and the account books to the district cadres in Cedar Rise, and report what had happened. Old Wang would remain in Aijya Ditch, while Carpenter and Phoenix would go back to the mountain hamlet—perhaps the men had hidden out in some cave, and would be able to get through after the enemy passed on. . . .

Phoenix and Carpenter returned to the mountain hamlet. At dusk there was still no news of Shih Defu or Shih Yungkung.

* * *

The whole afternoon of the 19th of August, to the east as far as Changgow Hill, south to Wujya Hill, all the way to Shajya Village in the west, criss-crossing the heights to a depth of over a dozen *li*, Hu Tsung-nan's Thirty-sixth Division dug fortifications. They built artillery emplacements, machinegun nests, rifle positions, communication trenches, even cooking stoves. . . . Only when the sun was setting behind the hills west of the Wuding River did they again assemble in their various units.

Shih Defu dug no fortifications for the enemy that afternoon. Blood from his lacerated back kept running down into his shoes, and he was trailed by a swarm of green-headed flies. Under orders from the sergeant, the corporal brought him to a knoll, put a shovel in his hands and ordered him to dig a trench. Shih Defu had already given up any hope that he

might live. He saw that all around the enemy soldiers had stacked their rifles and were hard at work digging, with the sweat pouring down their backs. He figured he was going to be killed sooner or later, that it would be better to die sooner and put an end to his torment. The idea was to crush a few enemy skulls with the shovel, then jump off the cliff! He asked the soldiers to free his bound arms. They refused. They said he could kneel and dig. He said he couldn't do that because of the pain in his thighs. The sergeant ordered the men to force him down. Shih Defu flung the shovel aside.

"I'm in hell already so the devil himself can't scare me! Do what you please. I won't dig!"

Furious, the sergeant howled for the men to tie Shih Defu's hands behind his back, and drag him off to one side. The soldiers should do the digging themselves. When they finished they were to bring Shih Defu back with them. Then the sergeant went away with a soldier carrying a sack of grain. Shih Defu lay in a patch of black beans all afternoon.

"When is the Field Army going to strike?" he wondered, peering at the hills north of the gorge.

At sunset, the soldiers prepared to return from their work, and the squad which had been guarding Shih Defu came to get him. They thought he was dead at first, but he stirred when one of the soldiers poked him. He was in an uneasy slumber. This was the longest rest he had had since the crisis started on the fourteenth. The sun had dried his wounds and they adhered to his clothing. He had been dreaming that he was serving as guide to the Field Army and that it was just about to wipe out the enemy. But when he awoke, there surrounding him were soldiers with American style service caps cocked over their eyes. They raised him to his feet.

Carrying their arms and equipment plus their shovels, the enemy troops marched off. The squad guarding Shih Defu lagged behind. The men cursed their sergeant as they walked.

"This fellow's no Communist big wig. One shot and he's finished. What's the use of keeping him?"

"Our sergeant is a queer duck. There's no telling what goes on in his mind!"

"What mind!" This from the corporal who twice wanted Shih Defu shot and who twice was overruled by the sergeant. He was very annoyed. "He doesn't give a damn about anything. If we're hungry, he doesn't feel it. Son of a bitch! When we were crossing the grasslands from Jingbien, he said we could rest when we got to Yulin. Son of a bitch! He fooled us into carrying stuff like pack animals; but when we reached Yulin, he said we had to go to Chenchuan. At Chenchuan he said we have to go to Wulungpu. Last night in that bloody rain it's a miracle we weren't all drowned...."

"Corporal," said a soldier in a cautious Honan accent, "you mustn't let the sergeant hear you talk like this."

"Son of a bitch! I'll tell it to him to his face! Didn't he give us a cock and bull story? All he worried about during that big rain was to get himself into a tent. Son of a bitch! Hurry up!" The corporal gave Shih Defu an angry push.

Shih Defu stumbled and nearly fell. Apparently there was a real conflict between the enemy officers and men. The latter were hungry and tired, and nightfall was approaching. Could it be that he still might find a way out; was there still hope for escape? Shih Defu's mind began racing again.

"Corporal, my arms are dead numb. At least untie my wrists and I'll be able to walk a little faster. You'll be able to eat that much sooner...."

A number of enemy soldiers immediately supported this proposal.

The corporal asked Shih Defu, "Will you go along quietly then? You won't pull any more tricks?"

"I'll go along quietly," Shih Defu changed his stubborn manner. He pretended to be quite docile, and added sympathetically, "I don't blame you men a bit. All this trouble is because that rotten Chiang Kai-shek plotted with America to make a civil war...."

"None of your propaganda!" the corporal shouted. "Just behave yourself and we'll untie you. When we get to the hilltop, we'll give you something to eat too."

"I'll behave." Shih Defu had accurately spotted tiredness and hunger as enemy weak points.

The cautious soldier from Honan untied his wrists. That afternoon he had saved the last few drops of water from the muddy liquid brought up to the soldiers from the river, and he gave Shih Defu a drink. Shih Defu was very grateful, and thereafter had kept looking thankfully in the man's direction. He noticed that the man was also stealing sympathetic glances at him. Shih Defu modified his categorical hatred of all those wearing the American type service cap.

"Go on!" said the Honanese.

At first, Shih Defu didn't realize that his wrists were free. The tight rope had practically cut off the circulation in his arms; he was paralyzed from the elbows down. It was several minutes before the blood came back into his fingers and he was able to move them again. He requested that they loosen the bonds on his upper arms. The corporal refused. He prodded Shih Defu with his rifle butt, urging him to walk faster. Shih Defu decided he'd better not press the point.

It was already dusk. Field kitchen stoves were spurting red flames, while white smoke arose from the newly lit campfires. Enemy soldiers were gathered in every hollow of the hill side. Neighing and whinnying, pack animals were rounded up for the night. There was enough noise and color and crowding for a country carnival after dark. On the slopes, great flowing masses of humanity blotted out the original lines of distinction between fields and paths. Within this seething movement were

several middle-aged peasants who had been caught during the afternoon. They were compelled to carry water and firewood up the hill, the "firewood" actually being the smashed remains of peasants' chairs, tables, door frames, chests of drawers, spinning wheels and weaving sets. They dropped their eyes when they met Shih Defu.

"Don't step on those telephone lines!" the soldier escorting them yelled.

Guarded by the squad, Shih Defu continued plodding up the slope. Off to one side he suddenly observed a group of young women. Their bobbed hair was all awry; the blouses and trousers of several of them had been ripped. . . . They were surrounded by a bunch of leering soldiers. Some of the men guarding Shih Defu went over for a look. They said the women were "girl cadres." Shih Defu's heart went out to them. This meant that a number of villages had failed to properly conceal their grain, clothing and furniture; that the older folks, women and children had not hidden themselves in time. They had fallen into the enemy's hands. Raging inwardly, Shih Defu was led into a wide gully.

Here, hundreds of pack animals were noisily munching green millet. Shih Defu's guards asked for directions to the brigade's intelligence company, then mounted a knoll to the north. It was completely dark now. Fires could be seen burning on many peaks to the east and to the south. Not far off ringing axes were chopping wood. . . .

Except for a path into the gully, the knoll was covered with khaki-uniformed enemy soldiers. There were heaps of wheat stalks, some of which had already been spread as bedding. Many soldiers sat cradling their rifles and eating thick wheat cakes which had been dropped by planes during the day. Along the east and west sides of the slope field stoves had been built and were being tended by captured peasants. A number of tents stood on several wide clearings on the top of the ridge. Lights were burning in all the tents; someone was telephoning in one, what sounded like a phonograph was playing in another. Shih Defu had once heard a phonograph in the Shajya Village landlord's house; he guessed the tents must be for the big shots. "Those bastards take good care of themselves wherever they are!" he muttered.

He wondered whether this could be brigade headquarters. There was the web of telephone lines, the great herd of pack animals, and now this row of tents. Besides, the squad guarding him was part of the brigade's intelligence company. Tensely, Shih Defu devoured the surrounding scene with his eyes.

Halfway up the knoll, they were confronted by the vicious sergeant.

"Why are you coming back so late?"

"The prisoner couldn't walk fast!" The corporal saluted, but he was obviously annoyed with his superior.

Just then an officer walked over. The sergeant snapped his hand up in salute.

"Reporting to the captain! The prisoner has been brought here. That's the guy. He's real tough. We couldn't beat a sound out of him."

The captain turned his flashlight on Shih Defu, then nodded several times.

"Local cadre. Not as important as the other one. That bird is at least a district officer. He pretended he's illiterate; he even got the peasants to identify him as a felt maker. Of course the Communists prepared the whole business! There's no hurry. All of you eat and get some rest. We'll look into this fellow tomorrow. Tonight Second Platoon is on guard duty. It will be responsible for both of the prisoners."

The captain spoke in an ordinary routine voice. He departed.

The corners of the corporal's mouth drooped. More trouble. His squad was part of Second Platoon.

"Why untied him? Eh? Who did it!" screamed the sergeant, glaring. He had noticed Shih Defu's wrists.

The men fell silent. They looked at their corporal.

"He didn't run away, did he?" the corporal replied indifferently. "He couldn't walk well, it was dark and we were in a hurry to get back. With his hands free he walked faster...."

"Tie them up!" The sergeant stared at the corporal with open enmity.

Two soldiers hurried to bind Shih Defu's wrists. Shih Defu said nothing—he was thinking of what the captain had said. Who was the other captured comrade? Secretary Jin and the rest were up north in Aijya Ditch. It couldn't be any of them. District chief Tsow and his men were fighting as guerillas in the south; could one of them have been caught by the enemy? No matter who it was, he now had a comrade in distress. With the two of them working together the chances of escape would be better! From what the captain said, they weren't going to finish him off tonight. The enemy soldiers were exhausted. This would be just the time to make a break! But suppose the Field Army decided to launch a night attack?

A man wearing a white shirt was being dragged up the eastern slope. He was a head taller than Shih Defu. Shih Defu's heart contracted. A great deal depended on this man in his plan to escape! The man was brought forward.

Oh! The fellow really was a felt maker! Shih Defu had been through such a turmoil the past few days, he had forgotten about him. He was one of the men district chief Tsow had sent with a message two nights before. His name was Homing, about thirty, a very clever person from Fourth *Hsiang*. Because felt making is light work, his hands were not calloused like a peasant's. No wonder the enemy thought he was an office worker.

The prisoners looked at each other. Both fully understood.

Homing's arms and hands were also tightly bound, but Shih Defu could tell from the way he walked that he probably had not been beaten

much. The two men were then tied to the same rope and led off toward the western slope.

"Even if you kill me, I'm still a felt maker from Yulin!" Homing said loudly to his captors.

Shih Defu realized he was being tipped off to his comrade's story. Very shrewd. Felt was a Yulin speciality and the town was occupied by the Kuomintang. Being just across the border of the liberated areas, people in Yulin spoke with almost the same accent as people here. Homing could therefore play his role quite convincingly. As a matter of fact, Shih Defu knew him to be an active Communist.

The sergeant cracked Homing a resounding slap across the face, and the latter said no more. "That bastard is cruelest of the lot!" thought Shih Defu.

They had walked about thirty paces when the sergeant pointed out the sector which the platoon was to guard. He warned the soldiers that it was difficult terrain, that they should be especially watchful of the prisoners during the night. Then, he turned and left.

The squad marched on past men cooking on a temporary field stove, proceeded a short distance down the slope, and halted. They had reached their destination.

Soldiers munching tough wheat cakes hailed the squad; there was an exchange of much swearing and laughter. Shih Defu seized on this moment to look the land over. Further down the slope was a small knoll through which snaked a dark communication trench. Other trenches branching from it led to the fortifications on the cliff side. Below the cliff was a knoll grooved with dry cuts leading into a big gorge. Shih Defu knew this cliff. It was about fifty feet high. With the aid of a small mattock and by grasping the vines and sour date trees that comprised its sparse vegetation, the peasants had climbed it during the winter off-seasons while hunting for fuel. Now, the ground had just been softened by the rain. Rolling down the cliff side probably wouldn't kill a man.

The prisoners were ordered to sit. Homing complied, but Shih Defu because of his wounded back could only slowly ease himself into a lying position. With pity in his eyes, Homing looked at Shih Defu. Though it made him more uncomfortable, Homing leaned as far back as he could so that the rope connecting them should not pull his injured comrade.

The soldiers of the guard squad drew their share of wheat cakes and began to eat. Shih Defu said he was hungry too.

"So you haven't forgotten?" said the corporal angrily, his mouth full. But this fellow was more human than the sergeant. He glared at the prisoners for a moment, then ordered one of his men to give Shih Defu and Homing each a wheat cake.

The man told Shih Defu to sit up. Clenching his teeth against the pain, Shih Defu struggled into an upright position. He figured that since the enemy was giving them food, their hands would have to be untied.

But the soldier had no such intention. He wanted them to draw up their legs, grip the wheat cakes between their knees, then lean forward and eat. Shih Defu said it was impossible. The soldier told the felt maker to try. Shih Defu gave the latter a wink, and the clever Homing, who could, as a matter of fact, have eaten in that manner, poked at the wheat cake with his mouth and sent it rolling on the ground.

"Hands aren't wings, are they?" Shih Defu demanded. "We're not going to fly away if you untie them. . . ."

"Huh!" grunted the soldier as he chewed, "I'm not going to untie you no matter what you say. Why should I risk my neck?"

"Corporal, maybe we have to die, but not by starving to death! Didn't you promise to feed me?" Shih Defu reminded him.

"Take their ropes off," said the corporal reluctantly. "When they finish, tie them up again."

The soldier with the wheat cakes tapped Shih Defu on the head with one of them, saying he was a real "trouble maker," and waited while two other men untied the prisoners. But it wasn't because Shih Defu was a "trouble maker" that the corporal was behaving this way. The corporal explained he only wanted the prisoners to eat quickly so that his men could get some rest sooner. Shih Defu had no illusions about the corporal's feelings toward him. Twice the corporal had recommended that he be shot. They were being untied only because the corporal was at odds with the sergeant and he was trying to get on the good side of his men.

"Eat hearty, master felt maker from Yulin," said Shih Defu to Homing. "If we're going to die, let's do it on a full stomach!"

"Stop your damn gabbing and eat!" snapped the corporal.

Shih Defu ignored him. Lying on his side again, Shih Defu gripped the wheat cake with both hands and bit into it. His mouth was dry and parched, and the wheat cakes the planes had dropped were nearly an inch thick, hard and sour. Swallowing was difficult, but to build up strength in case an opportunity to escape should arise, Shih Defu forced himself to eat. He was calling on Homing to eat well for the same reason.

From half a dozen yards up the slope came the call, "The soup's here!" There was a noisy clanking as the enemy soldiers unfastened their tin cups and scrambled to the soup pot.

"Don't grab! Don't grab!"

"This isn't from America. There's plenty of it!"

"Hey! Hey! If you knock the pot over, nobody will get any! . . ."

After a riotous interval, the soldiers came trooping back, each carrying a cup full of soup. The corporal had not joined the rush; the Honan soldier had gone for him, and now respectfully presented him with a cup. Shih Defu had only contempt for that kind of person. He wondered why the Honanese was playing up so to the corporal.

Again Shih Defu sounded off. "Corporal, I'm so dry I can't swallow. . . ."

The corporal exploded with a foul invective. "We beat you half to death and you don't make a sound! But you're plenty loud when it comes to eating!"

"This chap wants everything!" one of the men laughed coldly. "They're eating American canned stuff up in the tents. How'd you like some of that?"

Each soldier busied himself with his own soup. Shih Defu made no answer to the sarcastic wisecrack. Again he pressed the corporal. The latter was very irritated.

"Can't you wait till the men finish theirs? You're a real pain in the arse!"

"Fine!" Shih Defu said to himself. "I don't want you to like me; as long as you feed me that's all I ask!" The last time he ate was when he was with the Field Army battalion. That was a whole day ago.

In the pale light of a new moon, the Hu Tsung-nan soldiers joked about their "Three Flavored Soup" as they drank. Shih Defu was surprised. Where could they find the ingredients for an expensive soup like that way out in the country? When the soldiers finished, they gave each of the prisoners a cupful. Shih Defu painfully raised himself and squatted beside Homing. His soup was composed of millet, wheat grains and pumpkin all boiled together! Except for what the planes occasionally dropped, the enemy's only food was what they could scrape off the countryside. Shih Defu drank, very pleased that he had prevented the grain of the Shajya Village station from falling into the enemy's hands. He understood even more clearly now the importance of the leadership's call to conceal everything.

Homing, not having been injured, could eat more quickly. He soon finished and the enemy soldiers, ignoring his request for more, promptly re-tied him, while urging Shih Defu to hurry. Shih Defu continued chewing, unruffled. He wondered about Homing. The other night when they were trying to figure out the disposition of the enemy troops according to the fires they could see from the hill south of Shajya Village, Homing had been so calm and competent. Why did he now seem such a dunce, so simple-minded? Was he just acting, or was he really depressed? Shih Defu thought he'd better set him an example to stir up his fighting spirit.

He demanded more soup.

"How much does it take to satisfy you?" said the corporal nastily.

"I'm very hungry," Shih Defu replied boldly, "and tomorrow I'm going to die! You mean to say you won't let me eat my fill? You men may be wearing American style uniforms, but you're still Chinese, aren't you?"

These cutting words coming from a youth so rustic in appearance startled the enemy soldiers. They looked around at the rakishly cocked American type service caps. Evidently ashamed, for a moment no one

spoke. Finally, it was the Honan soldier again who came up with another cupful of soup.

"I can't finish this," he said to the corporal. "Can I give it to him? He's going to die soon...."

The corporal looked at Shih Defu speculatively, then nodded. The Honanese poured his soup into Shih Defu's cup. Yet even as Shih Defu was thanking him with his eyes, the man gave him a kick.

"This is the last you'll get!" said the soldier from Honan. Seeming quite uninterested, he walked away.

Shih Defu wondered as he drank the second soup. There was an honest Honan face beneath that American style service cap. What was going on in the man's mind? Why was he being so kind? And why was he so servile to the corporal, so respectful? The kick he gave was a fake; it didn't hurt a bit. Shih Defu didn't understand. He had heard that Hu Tsung-nan's Thirty-sixth Division was given the strongest anti-communist indoctrination. When Shih Defu was serving in the stretcher teams after the Panlung campaign, he heard that a prisoner captured from another of Hu's divisions had warned, "You may have licked us, but you'll never beat the Thirty-sixth!" Shih Defu didn't dare think too well of the soldier from Honan....

Then the ugly big sergeant came swaggering down the slope. "Which one of you untied him again? Eh?"

"The corporal told us to do it. He said let him eat faster so we can get some rest...." a frightened soldier hastily reported, while glancing at the corporal's darkening visage.

"If he gets away, whoever untied him will be shot!" snarled the sergeant. He shouted to all the soldiers on the slope to get ready for roll call, then gave the corporal special instructions to be followed during the night. This was the command post. If the prisoners escaped, he himself would have to pay with his life. The sergeant eyed the corporal balefully, then with an air of being very busy, rushed off.

Two soldiers hurried over to tie Shih Defu's hands.

"Let him finish the cup!" snapped the corporal. He stared venomously after the retreating figure of the sergeant and said in a low voice, "If you were squad leader I suppose you'd keep the prisoners tied and feed them yourself? Did you order me not to let them eat? If I die, you'll go with me! Last night I nearly drowned in the mountain torrent, and you hit me! Let's see you hit me again!" Raging like a madman, he turned on Shih Defu, "You dirty bastard! Hurry up and eat! I don't want any more of you goddam nonsense!"

Several of the soldiers expressed sympathy with the corporal. They said the sergeant was too extreme.

"While we were sweating on the fortifications, there wasn't a sign of him!"

"He was down in the valley with the brigade junior officers rounding up women!"

"Soldiers like us aren't supposed to have any tools!"

Shih Defu burned! These swine had to be wiped out, that's all there was to it! His mind rioted with pictures of trampled crops, good fields criss-crossed with trenches, furniture broken into firewood, old peasants turned into water carriers, raped and insulted women.... He looked at the dark hills to the north. Was the Field Army all prepared? This was the enemy's brigade headquarters, their command post. They were worried about the prisoners getting away. Well, he was more determined to escape than ever!...

Suddenly, from one of the tents on the ridge came the sound of a woman's voice. "Listen, listen!" the soldiers called to one another, and the men on the slope fell silent. In the stillness of the night, the woman's voice was penetrating and sharp. But she spoke in an accent which Shih Defu couldn't understand. He could only make out an occasional phrase, "National Army," "Communist Bandits".... Mao Tse-tung and Peng Teh-huai were mentioned, as were Chenchuan, Cedar Rise, Shajya Village.... Some of the military units of both sides....

Do the enemy officers bring their wives along? She's a loud-mouth show-off. The whole hill can hear her! Shih Defu was puzzled.

After a while she talked of something else, and the soldiers resumed their chatter. There was no woman in the tent and the music Shih Defu had heard earlier hadn't come from a phonograph—both were broadcasts from the Nanking radio station. The soldiers animatedly discussed the "news."

"Mao Tse-tung and Peng Teh-huai crossed the Yellow River. We couldn't catch them. . . ."

"How come our Ninetieth Division didn't get to Hsia till this morning?"

"Has our division become part of an army-corps? The radio said the 'Jungsung Army-Corps had advanced to east of Shajya Village from Chenchuan.' Is that us?"

"Hey," a soldier came up the slope and spoke to Homing. "How far is Cedar Rise from Shajya Village?"

"Twenty to thirty *li*."

"Bah!" the soldiers snorted in disbelief. They thought Cedar Rise was only a few *li* north of the gorge. Otherwise, why build fortifications here? One soldier angrily punched the felt maker.

"Can't you ever tell the truth!"

From the soldiers' elated conversation, Shih Defu could see that the enemy had been completely taken in by Chairman Mao's strategy. He was sure Chairman Mao hadn't crossed the river into Shansi; Commander Peng Teh-huai certainly couldn't have gone. But the enemy were living in the same dream world as the landlord Stinker Huai-tsung. They had

swallowed all the lies of the broadcast. They said the Field Army had lost more than half of its men at Yulin, that it was "crippled" and didn't dare launch another attack, that Commander Peng Teh-huai had taken the model brigade and the newly organized Third Column with him across the river, that four broken-down brigades were surrounded in the neighborhood of Cedar Rise; that two of these had tried to "escape" south by going west of Shajya Village the previous night, but were afraid the enemy marching up from Sweideh would cut them off and had retreated to their original positions before dawn, and so on, and so on. . . .

Shih Defu listened silently with joy in his heart. He drank his soup and forced down the tough wheat cake, building up his strength for an escape. The soldiers bound him again, the corporal ordering them to make especially tight knots which he wouldn't be able to work loose.

Bugles sounded on the ridge for roll call. One soldier remained behind to guard the prisoners; the rest ran to assemble on the south ridge. The guard ordered the captives off to one side, then he spread a bundle of wheat stalks for his bed. Before his hands should become too numb, Shih Defu hastened to loosen Homing's ropes. But by the time the felt maker was reaching to reciprocate, the guard had finished and returned.

The soldiers came back from roll call in high spirits. Their days of exposure to the sun and rain were over, they said. No longer would they have to climb the hills of north Shensi. Only "mopping up" remained, and the Thirty-sixth Division wouldn't be needed for that. The tail end of the broadcast had said the "Nationalists" had restored their administrations throughout the province of Shensi; not one county seat remained in Communist hands. Shih Defu marvelled at the gullibility of these Hu Tsung-nan soldiers. How could they be duped so easily by Chiang Kai-shek's blather?

All right! thought Shih Defu, gazing at the black hills across the gorge. We'll see who wipes out who!

After a boisterous interval, the soldiers settled down to sleep in the manner their sergeant had directed. Shih Defu lay between the corporal and the felt maker. Strong winds blew on the hills at night, and the soldiers covered themselves with their blankets. Shih Defu was afraid if he caught a chill in his stomach it would hinder his escape. He asked the corporal for a cover. At first the corporal refused, saying there weren't any extras, then he asked whether anyone had a spare. Again it was the Honan soldier who without a word produced a thin coverlet—a curtain stolen from some peasant's door. Shih Defu saw then that the Honanese had been lying on the other side of Homing. The soldier spread the curtain over the two prisoners as high as their waists. Looking at the man's decent face, Shih Defu thought of a character in a play he had seen—a good man who had been persecuted and forced into the reactionaries' army. Could that be the case with this fellow?

* * *

Night—deep and limitless night. Campfires still flickered on the nearby hilltops, but conversations died away. The snuffling of the pack animals carried distinctly across the distance....

Shih Defu could see only one fire on the hill to the west. Still further to the west, where the gully with the castor oil plants was, it was pitch black. Every few minutes, he quietly raised his head to look. Seven or eight captured peasants were squatting around a field stove. A sentry patrolled back and forth, his bayonet gleaming as he passed the stove. Lamps still burned in the tents.

Up until midnight, Shih Defu made no move, for fear that the enemy were not yet sleeping soundly. From Shih Defu's tenseness Homing could tell what was in his mind. Homing nudged him from time to time to indicate that he was waiting for a signal.

By about one in the morning, snores were rising in concert all along the slope. The lamps in the tents had been extinguished; no one was to be seen around the field stove. There remained only the sentry, steadily patrolling his beat. It took him about sixty seconds to march to the furthest point of his orbit, turn around, and walk back. As the sentry began one of his outward tours, Shih Defu edged closer to the felt maker. The corporal did not stir when the pressure of Shih Defu's chest was removed from his shoulder. Shih Defu turned his head and whispered.

"Homing, let's run for it!"

"Which way do we run?"

"To those trenches, then over the cliff."

The sentry was coming back. Shih Defu poked Homing; both men became silent. They waited till the sentry began marching away again, then Homing felt for the knots at Shih Defu's wrists.

Again the sentry marched back. Fumbling with the rope around Shih Defu's wrists, Homing grew tense every time the enemy soldier walked in their direction. Besides, the knots were very tight; it was painfully slow work. A half hour later, he still hadn't opened them. Homing's forehead was wet with perspiration. Although his ropes had been loosened by Shih Defu earlier, Homing could only move his hands awkwardly. Somewhere a rooster began to crow. Shih Defu was ready to burst with anxiety. Then the Honan soldier sleeping next to Homing rolled over.

He sat up. They were finished. He lifted their coverlet and felt their ropes. Strange, he didn't utter a sound. Well, it didn't matter. Unless they could get away at once, they were doomed anyhow. Because of the impression the man had made upon him, Shih Defu decided to risk it. He started to plead in a low tone, "You—" The Honanese placed his hand over Shih Defu's mouth....

The sentry began walking over. Slowly and calmly, the Honan soldier replaced the coverlet. The sentry squatted beside him and whispered so as not to disturb the sleepers.

"What's up?"

"I felt them move. I wanted to see if their ropes were all right."

"You're too simple. There's no way out of here. Besides, they're tied. They can't get away. You're always doing all the hard jobs. Go to sleep!"

"The sergeant said if they escape, our corporal will be shot. I'm afraid to really sleep. . . ."

"Ai!" The sentry sighed. He stood up and walked away.

Shih Defu and Homing, who had been desperately pretending to be deep in slumber, only then dared to release their breaths. During the first tour the sentry made after he resumed his patrol, the Honan soldier untied Homing; during the second, Homing released Shih Defu; during the third, the prisoners stole softly past the sleeping men and slipped into the communication trench.

Because of Shih Defu's injuries, Homing was the more agile of the two. Even before Shih Defu reached the end of the trench, he could hear the sound of vines and brambles ripping Homing's clothing as the latter sped down the steep incline. Without regard to where the sentry might be, Shih Defu clambered out of the trench, shielded his face with his arms, and raced downhill as fast as his legs could carry him.

An instant later he tumbled full tilt into a large puddle. He was covered with mud. The water eating into his open wounds, cut like knives.

As Homing hauled him out, clods of earth came rolling down. The Honan soldier was sliding toward them. His American style service cap was gone; his bald head was bare. In one hand he carried a rifle. Happy and grateful, the two men welcomed him.

"You've been so good to us. . . ."

"Keep moving, fast," panted the Honanese. To Homing he said, "Get rid of that white shirt. It makes too good a target. . . ."

Homing ripped off his shirt. With the Honan soldier he supported Shih Defu, and all three ran together. They hastened through a winding ravine over uneven ground. Before long they reached a deep gully. Running was a great effort for Shih Defu. When he spoke to Homing, he could barely catch his breath.

"Never mind about me! Take him to where this forks off. Then follow the north branch and go straight to the Field Army and report. I can go over the rise myself and cut past Shajya Village to the mountain hamlet. Old Chen from our co-op is there with our grain station account books. I can see him on the way. I'll go on and look for the Field Army from there. . . ."

"But you can't run very fast," protested Homing. "It'll be light soon. . . ."

"It doesn't matter," Shih Defu cut in decisively. "That's just the

reason we have to take different roads and look for the Field Army separately!"

The fugitive Honan soldier was in a new world. He hadn't the least idea of what was happening, and Shih Defu's words startled and worried him.

"That way won't be any good," he pleaded. "He's not from around here. If he loses the road we'll be in trouble!"

Shih Defu laughed. "Homing won't lose the road. He's one of our guerillas. You'll be safe going with him. We're all one family...."

His jaw dropping in astonishment, the Honan soldier stared at Homing. As the latter took him by the hand and started off, he kept looking back over his shoulder at Shih Defu rather longingly, as though there was still something he wanted to say. But Shih Defu had already cut across the gully and was arduously climbing the slope. It was three *li* nearer to the mountain hamlet by this route. He hoped Old Chen hadn't lost those account books....

XVII

Carpenter and Phoenix climbed to the peak behind the mountain hamlet and looked around. The great swath of gleaming fires covering the hills to the southeast was just like what people had often imagined Hell to be. Both the upper and lower gorge rang with intermittent rifle shots, sharp and echoing. Carpenter said the shooting must be because of clashes between scouting patrols. Fearing that enemy plain clothes men might sneak into the hamlet during the night, Phoenix and about a dozen local young women stayed with Carpenter, manoeuvring around the hill top, till the early hours of the morning.

Phoenix kept her eyes on those fiery hills to the southeast. She didn't say a word all night. The strong stubborn figure of Shih Defu never left her mind; her ears could hear only his firm tones—"Do your work well. . . ." "Nobody can stop us from getting married. . . ." "Once the revolution succeeds, there's nothing we can't do. . . ." Shih Defu was always busy for the revolution, too busy in fact to court her properly. . . .

And now? Would he be able to get out of that hell? Would he still be able to do his "work well" until the "revolution succeeds"? Phoenix closed her eyes, and she could see the virile Shih Defu—leading the peasants in shouting political slogans at the mass meeting to square accounts with the landlords, roaring his name out at a mobilization rally for army volunteers, working all day and then staying up half the night on patrol. . . . Once, on the way home from Chenchuan, he had met an old man carrying a heavy sack of grain. Though they were utter strangers, Shih Defu took that sack and toted it twenty *li*, all the way to Shajya Village. . . .

"He can't die! He has to live!" she whispered fiercely. This was

not a purely personal prayer, for Phoenix had felt for a long time that even after they married Shih Defu would not belong to her alone. He belonged to the people!

* * *

Shih Defu barely recognized the hill east of Shajya Village, it was so furrowed with trenches. He came to one wide ditch, deep as a man, where the excavated damp earth had been loosely piled on both edges. Leaping across in the dark, Shih Defu missed his footing, and slid heavily into the ditch. He sprained his ankle....

Shih Defu rubbed his foot and swore. "Now how can I run?"

But he had to keep going. He dragged himself out of the ditch and hobbled on till he reached the familiar ravine. He decided to go through Shajya Village, into the gorge, and then across to the mountain hamlet.

A ghostly silence pervaded the village. With most of its compound gates and cave doors gaping blackly open, it looked as though no one had lived there for years. The street and compounds were filled with debris. In the east, the sky was turning light, and Shih Defu could see scattered about tables, stools, clothing, blankets.... Obviously, the enemy soldiers had wrecked and plundered the village. Suddenly Shih Defu noticed a man seated leaning against a gateway, with a long white beard down to his chest.

"He sure is a tough old fellow," thought Shih Defu, drawing close. He whispered to him, "You wouldn't go up into the hills; at least you ought to hide in one of the caves. Why are you sleeping out here? Grandpa, grandpa, grand—"

Shih Defu squatted beside him and shook him. The old man was already stiff. Looking closer Shih Defu saw a pool of blood beneath his feet.

"Ah!" Shih Defu sighed and stood up. He recalled what the old man had related during the meeting to settle accounts with the landlord last spring.

The old man had been a queer one, very argumentative. He said he had suffered all his life, but just as he was approaching the end of his days, Heaven had sent Chairman Mao, and at last he was able to draw a full breath. That was why, in the winter of 1937 when the Eighth Route Army had marched into their region, although he had gotten very sick he hadn't died. The others laughed at and teased him. They said millions of people were drawing their first full breath; why was it that not one of them had even a belly ache that winter? He had been worse off than any of them, but the Communist Party brought him happiness which made his illness grow milder day by day, explained the old man. It amounted to extending his life span. Shih Defu was only fifteen in 1937, working as a shepherd for Stinker Huai-tsung in Kungjya Gully. He remembered the tragic scene when the Shajya Village landlord evicted the old man for debt from a home his family had lived in for generations. Then, when the Eighth Route Army first came, the landlords became frightened and

relaxed their pressure somewhat. Later, during the rent-reduction struggle, the old man's debt, along with all the others' old usurious debts, was cancelled. But it wasn't until last spring, when the old man got all the sordid grievances off his chest at the accounts-settling mass meeting, that he really felt satisfied.

Recalling how the old man had refused to reveal the hiding place of the grain station cadres when the enemy punched his face three days before, and how in the past two days he had repeatedly risked his life for their sake, Shih Defu was extremely moved. He addressed the motionless figure as if the old man were still alive.

"Grandpa, you've got one son at the front carrying grain, and the other is in the army. Your womenfolk are all hiding out in the cliff caves. I want to take you to a quieter spot. But it'll be daylight soon, and I have to find the Field Army in a hurry. They'll revenge us! . . ."

At dawn, with tears in his eyes, Shih Defu left Shajya Village. Because of his injuries, he was afraid he couldn't go straight up the steep slope to the mountain hamlet. He guessed there wouldn't be any enemy in the big gorge at this point, and decided to follow the road for about one *li* to a place where the ascent was easier.

Before he had gone two hundred paces, he suddenly saw a number of men in brown uniforms coming around the bend ahead of him. In the distance he couldn't make out whether they were friend or foe. He plunged toward a fissure in the cliff face to give himself time for a more careful look. But four men came running quickly; one was pulling the bolt of his rifle.

"Countryman, countryman, don't run away!"

As soon as he heard "countryman," Shih Defu's whole body was bathed in warmth. Perspiring freely, he turned around. They were men of the Field Army, and they had already caught up.

"Why are you running? How did you get so muddy?"

"See if he's carrying anything on him."

"Why don't you speak instead of just wiping your tears?"

"Say—that's Shih Defu from Shajya Village!" A guide from a neighboring village came hastening over. He had drawn grain at Shajya Village only two days before. Now he asked in astonishment, "There were several men at your grain station. What are you doing here alone?"

Shih Defu couldn't say a word. There seemed to be a great lump in his throat. He had never been this way before. When the enemy had beaten him cruelly he had appeared to be physically incapable of weeping. Rushing to bring an important report to the Field Army, it never even occurred to him that he might cry. But after a day and a night of torment in the enemy's hands, and then the shock of coming upon the tragically murdered old man with the white beard, the sight at last of our own soldiers made him so happy he couldn't control his tears.

The soldiers examined him. They were startled by the wounds on

his back and the marks the rope had left on his arms. A comrade carrying a leather dispatch case approached from the upper gorge.

"Company Commander Liu," he called, "let the troops rest here. The men behind haven't caught up yet." He looked at Shih Defu. "Aiya! Who beat him like this?"

Shih Defu grasped the man's hand with both of his own. "Staff Officer Huang, let me go with you and get my revenge!"

"Eh?!" Huang's eyes went wide, then he peered closely at the mud-spattered face. "Isn't your name Shih Defu? Ah...."

"You know him?" Company Commander Liu was having trouble following.

"This comrade was in the stretcher teams with us for three months, through the forests of east Kansu and across the desert around the three border cities. He made an excellent showing." Huang turned to Shih Defu. "What happened to you?"

"The enemy beat me. I got away over the cliff," Shih Defu said shortly; then he pressed, "Let me go with you. I want revenge. I was just looking for our army!"

"That's impossible. You've been hurt too badly. We're going to fight. You won't be able to keep up...."

"I escaped from the enemy brigade headquarters," Shih Defu insisted. "I know where their command post is!"

"What!" chorused Huang and Liu. "You've come from the headquarters of the 165th Brigade? Where is it?"

Shih Defu thought a moment, then he stated its distance from its surrounding landmarks with such exactitude that the officers were able to locate and mark it on their military map. Huang immediately wrote a report and told Liu to dispatch a man with it to headquarters command.

"We'll revenge you!" said Liu excitedly. "I guarantee it. We've got guides. You don't have to take us there."

"I'll write a note for you. You take it to the rear and find Staff Officer Shao," added Huang. "He'll get you to the first aid station. The weather's hot. You can't let those wounds go without dressing any longer."

His injuries were rather serious, and his sprained ankle made walking slow and painful. Shih Defu had no choice; he'd have to stay behind. As he got ready to leave, he reported the trenches he had seen on his way. The officers said they already had that information. Their scouts had located all the enemy fortifications along the front during the night.

Shih Defu grinned. "All right, where's the rear?"

"In the mountain hamlet," said the guide from the neighboring village. "A bunch of young women from Shajya Village are up there. Go on, get going."

Only then did Shih Defu think of Phoenix. But an instant later the bent figure of Old Chen with the grain station account books under his arm replaced her in Shih Defu's mind. Staff Officer Huang finished writing

his note, and handing it to Shih Defu said that after his injuries were dressed he would be sent to a small field hospital. From there, if necessary, he could go to the large hospital of the Field Army. He told Shih Defu not to hesitate to speak up. They would definitely give him the same treatment as any wounded soldier.

"Aiya! Please don't write that!" cried Shih Defu frantically. "In the first place, all my grain station records are in someone else's hands. In the second place, my district Party secretary has got work waiting for me! . . ."

"Are you crazy? What kind of work can you do in your condition?"

Word was brought that all the rearguard men had caught up; the army was going to continue its march. Huang and Liu hastily bid Shih Defu farewell; the latter stepped off the road in front of a big boulder and watched the troops stride by. Every soldier who saw his condition drew a sharp breath of surprise. Some of the guides from north of the gorge recognized him.

"What in the world happened to you?" a few asked.

"Got beaten up by the enemy!" Shih Defu responded simply, almost cheerfully. It was very odd. The tears he had just shed seemed to have washed all the black mood out of his body. Elated, he watched the men of the Field Army marching past. "Now we'll see whether Hu Tsung-nan's bandits are really as tough as they think they are!"

And there was Pa Hu, his knapsack on his back, walking ahead of one of the units!

"Pa Hu! Pa Hu! Pa Hu. . . ."

"Oh! What's wrong with you! . . ." Pa Hu had no time to say any more. The unit behind him was moving up quickly. He turned his head back several times as he marched away.

Troops, stretcher teams, troops, stretcher teams, followed on one after the other. After a long while, when the sun was fully up, Shih Defu was left alone in the gorge. He broke a branch from a tree, and using it as a staff, started out. His sprained ankle had swollen and he walked very slowly. As he entered the ravine leading to the mountain hamlet, the sun was crimsoning the hill tops. Suddenly, from the direction of Shajya Village came the wild chatter of machineguns, interspersed with the crumping bursts of hand grenades. . . .

The full-scale battle had finally started.

* * *

Step by step, Shih Defu trudged painfully on. Walking a while, resting a while, he slowly mounted a knoll. It had taken him half the morning to cover only three *li*.

East and south of Shajya Village for a radius of over ten *li*, yellow dust, smoke and flame rose to the heavens. Heavy guns of many calibres drowned out the sound of rifle fire. Two planes, bombing and machine-gunning, circled over the battle zone. Shih Defu could see numerous telephone lines spreading out like a web from the mountain hamlet.

That's right, he thought. This is the rear. It may even be the command post.

Suddenly, from the neighborhood of the mountain hamlet, artillery opened fire. Probably because the guns were so near, their sound blotted out all else. The ground shook, and shells whooshed over Shih Defu's head. A minute later, enemy shells came whistling back. An artillery duel roared into full swing. Two fighter planes skimmed over, circling and machinegunning, followed by two heavy bombers sailing up from the south. The latter circled too, then dumped their explosives. Some landed uncomfortably close to Shih Defu, prone in a black bean patch, and their tremendous bursts nearly deafened him.

The planes seemed to be in a great hurry; they flew off after only a short interval of bombing and strafing. Soon, this side stopped firing, and the enemy artillery at once became quiet too. Shih Defu got to his feet and looked around. Except for crops swaying in the slight summer breeze, he could see no other activity. Shih Defu was puzzled. Wasn't this supposed to be the rear? He wondered whether these powerful field-pieces could reach enemy headquarters. The thought stirred him into action. Although it took all his will power to conquer his pain, he rushed toward the slope. Bending forward, his arms dangling loosely at his sides, Shih Defu ran through the black bean patch, across a corn field, through a stretch of tall sorghum....

A few minutes later he stood beneath a big tree in the mountain hamlet. Utterly exhausted, he panted, gasping for breath. Not a soul was in sight, but from the compound of a nearby cave home he could hear a man shouting into a telephone.

"...They didn't hit anything.... Yes...I said—I said the enemy's artillery position must be very close to the command post of their 165th Brigade.... What?... Coordinate fire with our forward position mortars?... In a little while? All right.... Very good...."

"What are you doing here?" Shih Defu turned to find a comrade had come up behind him.

"Where's Staff Officer Shao?" Shih Defu pulled out his note from Staff Officer Huang and handed it over. "I've just escaped from the enemy. I know where the command post of their 165th Brigade is...."

The comrade quickly read through the sweat-soaked note. "Good, good...." Supporting Shih Defu with two hands, he led him across the compound into the cave.

Staff Officer Shao—a vital wiry person—upon hearing the comrade's report and after reading the note, was completely delighted. He urged Shih Defu to explain how he knew that his place of captivity was the command post. Shih Defu told him about the converging telephone lines, the row of tents, the radio, what the enemy sergeant had said.... Everyone nodded and smiled. So this was the source of Staff Officer Huang's note to headquarters command! Shao questioned Shih Defu closely on where the telephone lines were most numerous....

"There's a little bluff near the mouth of the gully. The enemy dug a small cave in it. All the lines lead in there."

"How far is it from the mouth of the gully?"

"About ten paces. Below that is a place where all the enemy carry red cross kits. And below that—"

"Good. Wait a minute, comrade." Shao was satisfied. He turned to the telephone operator. "Get me 201, quick!"

The connection was made, and Shao picked up the receiver. "201? Shao speaking. That comrade who escaped from the enemy is here. . . . Reliable. He brought a note from Huang, and he's got injuries from a beating. He knows where the enemy telephone center is. . . . All right? . . . Right. . . . Right. . . . Right. . . . Very good."

Shao put down the phone. He looked at Shih Defu's wounds, then asked warmly, "Can you go up the hill and help us direct our artillery fire?"

"Of course. Even if it kills me I'll be happy if I can help you shoot straight!" Shih Defu said excitedly, thinking of the cruel excesses of the Hu Tsung-nan gangsters.

Shao immediately ordered two comrades to help Shih Defu up the hill. The three men left the hamlet, went through a communications trench and climbed to the artillery position. It was manned by the mountain gun battery of the First Column's Eighth Brigade. The battery commander and the political instructor, who had already been notified by Staff Officer Shao, received Shih Defu with open arms. By this time, Eighth Brigade infantry had driven the enemy back a distance, and the western front was temporarily quiet. Artillery duels had shifted to the Changgow Hill region, where four planes were wheeling and diving. . . .

Shih Defu stood on the edge of the gun emplacement looking through a pair of field glasses whose focus the battery commander had adjusted for him. He pointed out the locations of the tents, the wide gully where he had seen the mass of pack animals and where the telephone center was. The others followed his directions through their own glasses. From Shih Defu's descriptions, the battery commander and the political instructor agreed that the enemy 165th Brigade had concentrated all its ammunition as well as its entire headquarters' complement on the eastern knoll of the same hill top from which enemy artillery fire had just responded to their trial shots. Their superiors had ordered the artillery battery to find and destroy enemy headquarters command—the nerve center of the brigade. Then our infantry could cut the enemy into sections which it could surround and destroy piecemeal. Now that vital target had been clearly identified.

Sweating ammunition men began to bring up the heavy shells; gunners calculated the range. The commander of the powerful mountain battery wanted Shih Defu to return to the hamlet before they opened fire. Shih Defu refused.

"I want to watch!" This would be the release of his pent-up hatred!
"Comrade," said the battery commander, "the pounding is terrific. Maybe you..."

"You're not afraid; neither am I. Aren't we all the same?"

The telephone rang. His field glasses slung from his neck, the commander picked up the receiver. "Yes. We're ready..." He looked at his wrist watch. "Right, right... Say, that comrade doesn't want to go down... He wants to watch. Uh-huh... Good... Good..."

The commander put down the phone and turned to Shih Defu. "You can stand over there."

Shih Defu walked a few paces away and climbed to the edge of the gun emplacement pit. With only his head showing, he looked over the top at the bald yellow peak in the distance. He thought of the enemy sergeant who had ordered him to be beaten. Shih Defu ground his teeth.

"You didn't kill me after all. Now let's see how you bastards like being on the receiving end!"

Ten minutes passed. The battery commander raised his signal flag. Shih Defu covered his ears with his hands. Then, several mountain guns thundered in unison. Flames belched from their barrels and shells hurtled through the air with a ripping sound. To the east, the south and the southeast, more Field Army artillery joined the barrage. The terrible withering fire all converged on the yellow hill top and its hollowed ridge. The enemy artillery never even had a chance to come into action. Great clouds of smoke and dust billowed into the sky and hung like a pall over the hill top. With his naked eye, Shih Defu could see nothing but a huge yellow haze!

He remained until the order came to cease fire. Only then, supported by two comrades, did he return to the hamlet. It was as if he had successfully completed a difficult mission. Shih Defu had gotten his revenge; he felt light and happy.

As Shih Defu paused to rest a moment in the shade of the big tree, Staff Officer Shao, grinning broadly, rushed up and threw his arms around him.

"Wonderful! Now our infantry can cut through! We can finish the first stage of the battle!" Shao cried triumphantly. But then he started to talk of sending Shih Defu to have his wounds attended, and he became worried.

"We can't spare a single army man, and all our pack animals are needed to carry equipment. It's the same with the peasants—every able-bodied man is hard at work."

Shih Defu was unperturbed. "Where is the first aid station?"

"The next village north of here..."

"You don't have to escort me. I'll get someone from my village to go along."

Shih Defu understood that everyone was busy with the battle. "There are some Shajya Village women and girls here. . . ."

"Not any more," a comrade interjected. "When our troops came down, all the girls volunteered as nurses. They went over to that big village."

Shih Defu's eyes shone with pleasure. The girls hadn't just been talking; they really were supporting the front.

"First, you find a place where you can get some rest," said Shao, after he thought a bit. "I'll telephone the first aid station and see whether they can send a stretcher team down for you."

"No, no! You don't have to do that!" Shih Defu grabbed Shao by the arm. "After I rest a while, I'll work my way there slowly myself. There was an old man here with our grain station account books. I want to ask some of the local people if they know where he's gone first...."

"You go," said Shao to a comrade beside him. "Find some of the hamlet folks and bring them here. I've got to make a phone call."

Shao went back into the compound, and the comrade trotted off toward the upper end of the hamlet. A few minutes later he returned, followed by an old man and several old women. When the comrade told them that a Shajya Village youth had escaped from the enemy after having been beaten, they guessed it was Shih Defu. Now they anxiously asked Shih Defu whether his wounds were serious. Shih Defu said he didn't know. They opened his bloodstained shirt and looked at his back, then cried out in shocked dismay. A few of the old women began to weep.

"Dear old friends, don't cry," said Shih Defu. "Do you know where the old man with the grain station account books went?"

"You didn't have to worry about that," the local old peasant replied pityingly. "He took them up to the district government and turned them over...."

"Good!" Shih Defu was completely relieved. "Now is there a cave where I can rest a while on the *kang*?"

The peasants said they had turned over all the caves at this end of the hamlet to the army; they themselves were doubling up in a compound in the upper end. Shih Defu didn't want to disturb the army men. He said he'd go along with the peasants. After a rest and something to eat he would go on to the first aid station.

His telephone call completed, Shao came running out. "Comrade Shih, I really owe you an apology. All of the stretchers have gone to the front. If you'll wait until after noon, we'll do our best to find some way to send you over. Will that be all right?"

"It doesn't matter," replied Shih Defu. "If I rest all morning, I can go myself."

Staff Officer Shao wanted to send two messengers to look after Shih Defu's needs and prepare food for him, but the old folks wouldn't hear of it. The army was busy fighting, they said. They would take full responsibility for Shih Defu.

When Shih Defu entered a cave in the peasants' compound, twenty to thirty women—some local, some from Shajya Village—crowded in after

him. All were carrying either infants or pregnantly protruding abdomens. They set up a clamor at the sight of Shih Defu's wounds; they wept and cursed the enemy. From them Shih Defu learned how frantic Phoenix had been when there was no news of him. Nevertheless, in spite of Orchid's urging that she continue to wait here, this morning Phoenix had insisted on going with the other girls to the next village to work as a nurse. Shih Defu thought of her adorable ruddy face, and he smiled with pride and happiness.

"And what about Uncle Carpenter?" he asked.

"He's busy too," replied one of the women. "Didn't you men spend two mornings giving out grain for the peasants to hide? He went off with the army to collect it again."

All of this news was a great satisfaction to Shih Defu. The only thing that worried him was the fact that Shih Yungkung had not reached Aijya Ditch. When they ran into the enemy, Shih Defu had let him run first; still, Shih Yungkung hadn't got away. Shih Yungkung was so timid, so many things bothered him. Shih Defu hated to speculate on the possibilities. He thought of Shih Yungkung's wife and old mother, his large brood of children. If anything happened to Shih Yungkung, it would be up to the people to take good care of them. . . .

The Shajya Village women had all come from the cliff caves. Because the caves were south of the gorge, the women hadn't dared to remain. They had come north and scattered among various villages. One of them told Shih Defu that his mother was a little better. A neighbor's wife was looking after her, and they had gone north together. Shih Defu barely listened. He was thinking of Shih Yungkung's mother. She was always so concerned about her son!

The women got busy. Some cooked rice gruel for Shih Defu; others found clothing into which he could change. He went into an adjoining cave with the old man, who helped him out on the clean clothes. The *kang* there was already spread with five layers of quilts for Shih Defu to sleep on. A number of women suggested that egg fluid was very effective for broken swollen skin. Shih Defu was afraid that a home remedy would make him worse; he told them to ask some of the army men. They soon returned with word that if the dressing was first washed with boiled water, and their own hands were cleaned thoroughly, applying egg fluid with fresh cotton would be useful. The women promptly ran around the hamlet and collected about two dozen eggs with which they treated Shih Defu's injuries.

By the time this was over and Shih Defu had finished the rice gruel, it was noon. Everyone went out and left Shih Defu alone to sleep.

XVIII

In the morning, the various fighting units of the Field Army began coming to grips with Hu Tsung-nan's Thirty-sixth Division. By noon, the Division was cut into several sections, each of which was encircled.

The 165th Brigade fell into confusion after its command post was destroyed by the artillery fire which Shih Defu had helped direct. The brigade headquarters command, plus a regimental headquarters command, fled to Wujya Hill; another regimental command and what remained of two other regiments were cut off and surrounded on a nearby hill. Even worse was the condition of the enemy 123rd Brigade on Changgow Hill on the eastern front. Carved up into many pieces, it was separated from the Thirty-sixth Division headquarters by two Field Army brigades and a distance of seven or eight *li*.

At one p.m., from a village twenty *li* due north of Shajya Village, the General Headquarters of the Northwest Field Army issued the order of Peng Teh-huai, Vice Commander-in-Chief of the People's Liberation Army:

"... The destruction of the Thirty-sixth Division will mark the beginning of the change of our strategy in the Northwest; from strategic defence we are switching to strategic counter-attack. It will mark the beginning of the re-taking of Yen-an and the liberation of the entire Northwest. Our leaders and men at the front must fight boldly. Their task today is to completely annihilate the Thirty-sixth Division before dusk."

Shortly thereafter, Staff Officer Shao received instructions by telephone to move the artillery battery to the hill south of Shajya Village—the quicker the better. . . . He conferred with the battery commander. They needed a good guide, and they needed him in a hurry. After a brief discussion, they went to the compound where Shih Defu was resting; but the women wouldn't let them enter the cave. Shih Defu mustn't be awakened, the women whispered. He had just fallen asleep; he had stopped groaning only a minute ago. . . .

"It doesn't matter," the battery commander said to Shao. "He only has flesh wounds and a bad ankle. If he rides a mule he can go."

"Why didn't you give him the mule to ride to the first aid station?" demanded one of the women. This remark immediately aroused the indignation of another woman.

"What are you saying! Those animals all have to be used for the fighting!"

Staff Officer Shao laughed amiably. "Right! What this aunty says is correct!" Then he asked the women, "What do you say—should we let Shih Defu suffer a little pain and be a guide for the artillery so that we can wipe the enemy out fast? Or should we let him sleep and let the enemy get away?"

"It's for you that we're fighting!" the battery commander added.

The women were silent.

"If there's a mule to ride, my old man could go," suggested an old lady. "How would that be, comrade? . . ."

"I'll go!" The old timer in question hobbled forward. "I guarantee to lead you right to any place within twenty *li* of here. . . ."

"Nothing doing!" snapped the battery commander. He was perspiring with impatience. He pushed open the door of the cave. "Shih Defu's better than an old man for this job no matter how you look at it! . . ."

Shao and the battery commander entered the cave, the women crowding in behind them. Shao shook Shih Defu gently. Shih Defu raised his head and peered sleepily at the staff officer.

"Has the stretcher come from the first aid station?"

"I'm terribly sorry. They've been too busy at the front."

"That's all right. The front is the important thing." Shih Defu sat up. "The women used egg fluid to wash my wounds and they don't hurt any more. I feel much better. You've come to see me—doesn't that hold up your work? Have we finished off the enemy already?"

They told him about General Peng Teh-huai's order, and how the artillery battery needed a guide to move to its new post. Shih Defu put both hands down on the five thicknesses of quilts, and quickly pushed himself to his feet.

"Let's go! Not one of the enemy must get away!"

Shao could see that the women's ministrations had made a different person out of Shih Defu, and he was deeply moved. The people are splendid, thought Shao. That's why we can be sure of victory.

The women looked at Shih Defu with loving concern. "You're all for the revolution, and of course that's fine. But we're afraid your wounds will keep getting worse. . . ."

Shih Defu cut them short. "My skin may rot but my bones are still strong!" He repeated the quotation Secretary Jin had taught him, "Communists are made of special stuff! . . . Comrade Shao, are your men all ready?"

"They're getting ready now," Shao responded cheerily. He was surprised that a Party member in a little village should know that phrase.

Just as Shao had stated, the artillery battery comrades were busy loading and tying their equipment on the backs of their pack animals. Shortly afterwards, the battery assembled in travel formation. At their head, on a sleek shiny mule, sat Shih Defu. He rode high on a thickly folded quilt. All the men and animals were camouflaged with branches; Shih Defu too had a ring of willow encircling his head. They looked like the ancients decked out for a ceremony of prayer to the rain dragon. A group of women stood beneath a big tree, eyeing Shih Defu admiringly. Filled with an anticipation of victory, they watched the battery descend

into the ravine, the camouflage branches joggling on the men and animals. . . .

* * *

At the front, the men and their leaders were carrying out General Peng Teh-huai's order with courage and withering fire. Fierce battles raged east and south of Shajya Village. In the air, the four enemy planes had turned out to be six; on the ground, artillery and machinegun fire was immersed by wave after wave of a single refrain roaring from thousands of throats—"Charge!" It was a sound that stirred one to forget hunger, pain or fear.

Only one thought existed—wipe out the enemy!

The artillery battery had gone through the ravine and travelled a short distance inside the gorge when it was spotted by two enemy fighter planes. The men were old hands at air raids—they were out of sight before the planes had finished their first strafing run. The soldiers and their animals were safely concealed, but Shih Defu's mount had bucked in fright and tossed him to the ground, injuring his elbow. Fortunately, the comrade leading the mule had held tightly to the reins, and Shih Defu escaped being trampled. Several comrades felt his elbow to see whether it had been dislocated.

The battery commander came running up. "Comrade Shih, are you all right?"

"I'm all right. Don't bother about me."

A number of men berated the comrade who had been leading the mule, and the commander glared at him indignantly, demanding to know whether he was afraid. Shih Defu hastily took the comrade's side. The mule had been terrified by the noise of the diving and strafing planes, said Shih Defu. Anyone who wasn't tied on like a gun barrel would have been thrown off. It wasn't the comrade's fault.

The political instructor hastened over too. After inquiring about Shih Defu, he conferred with the battery commander. Marching through the gorge, they would find it difficult to avoid air raids. Ahead of them, the gorge stretched wide and open.

"There's a path we can follow," Shih Defu suggested. "It detours two or three *li*."

"But can we get the animals through on it?"

"I think so. Our peasants often cross to the fields on the hills here with donkeys carrying manure."

"Good. Take us along the path then."

Several comrades wanted to lift Shih Defu on to the mule again, but he refused to ride. He asked that they find him a stout stick and let him walk. The path was bumpy and steep; a fall would be dangerous.

"Can you walk on that sprained ankle?" asked the political instructor.

"Sure. If this will help us clean up the enemy, what do I care about a little pain? Come on!"

"Fine!" shouted the artillerymen. "He's a fine comrade! We'll see to it that he's revenged!"

Leaning on a staff, Shih Defu walked vigorously in spite of his limp. He led the artillery battery into a narrow twisting defile. The battery commander kept looking at his wrist watch—they had set out at five after two; the air raid had delayed them twenty minutes. . . . It was three fifteen by the time they reached the foot of the hill south of Shajya Village.

On the hill, the gun positions had already been prepared for them, and telephone lines had been connected. People were waiting for them on the slope, and both groups hailed one another when the battery came into sight. The commander told Shih Defu to remain in the ravine and rest. The battery continued up the hill.

By three forty the guns were mounted on their carriages and were ready to commence firing. Only the order was awaited. Then Shih Defu appeared, grasping his staff and panting heavily.

"What are you doing here?" demanded the battery commander, fretful for Shih Defu's sake. "You should be resting down below so that if an order comes to advance you'll be in condition to guide us again!"

"I couldn't sit still down there," Shih Defu replied casually. As a matter of fact, with war cries at the front shaking the heavens, and here the artillery ready to open up, it was impossible for him to remain quietly in the ravine.

The artillery battery was set up on the upper slope of the private cemetery of Shajya Village's landlord family. A well-tended grove of cedars served as an effective screen for the saddle and pack animals. This time, Shih Defu had no field-glasses. He stood on the top of a high grave mound and surveyed the surrounding hills. All was quiet where the enemy 165th Brigade command had been, but Wujya Hill was partly obscured by a cloud of dust and smoke.

The telephone rang, and a moment later the first salvo thundered. Pillars of smoke arose from the temple on Wujya Hill. "A hit! A hit!" shouted the comrades looking through their field-glasses. Observing them and then peering at the target, Shih Defu was so thrilled he could barely keep his footing on the grave mound.

After the third salvo, the telephone rang again. The commander spoke briefly, listened, and hung up.

"Comrades!" he announced. "We've got them running south! The fighting on Changgow Hill will be finished soon too. On this front we have to pour it on hard! The Thirty-sixth Division headquarters has fled from Wujya Hill to Feng Hill. It's their last stand. Our infantry has cut them off southeast and southwest and is closing in. Our orders are to go southeast to Howjya Ravine and help the infantry. Comrades, victory is before us. Let's look sharp now. Get the pack animals ready, fast!"

The artillerymen responded with alacrity.

"How do we get to Howjya Ravine?" the commander hurried over and asked Shih Defu.

"We have to go back into the ravine," Shih Defu replied tensely. He flung down his staff and rushed to help the men put the shells into the carrying cases.

The political instructor stopped him. "You don't have to do that, comrade."

"I think you'd better do what we tell you," said the commander. He had four heavy artillery shells in his hands. "Your guide work is important! You've been badly hurt. After all, how much strength have you got? If you tire yourself out and we're delayed, then what?"

The stern light in the commander's eyes cowed Shih Defu a bit, and he picked up his staff. Although Shih Defu couldn't see the battlefield in the southeast clearly, he stared impatiently toward it.

As soon as the animals were loaded, the battery descended into the ravine. It was nearly five p.m. Shih Defu led them quickly through the narrow pass. The sound of artillery and light arms gradually grew fainter as they travelled.

The commander was in a tearing hurry, but the path was too small. It was even more precipitous and uneven than the one they had come on. They had to stop and repair it several times before the animals could proceed. In spite of his painful ankle, Shih Defu was always well in the lead. Time and again, he had to wait for them to catch up. Seeing the commander personally wielding a shovel where the steep cliff side jutted into the narrow pass, watching him wiping the sweat from his forehead with his sleeve, all Shih Defu could do was to refrain from taking the shovel into his own hands. Shih Defu was much more adept at it than any of the artillerymen.

Though they pushed on as fast as they could, they didn't reach the big road below the hill of Howjya Ravine until six p.m. The sun was setting as they climbed to their destination which was on a wide level plateau. The communications men began removing their wires.

In the rosy light that bathed the plateau, many prisoners captured by various units were assembled. Groups of them sat beneath the trees listening to the words of comrades who specialized in handling prisoners. As the artillery battery climbed into sight, someone shouted:

"The artillery is here at last!"

"Tell them not to come any further!" cried a cadre with a southern accent. "Assign a guide to lead them to the camping area. Let them go first!"

A comrade ran up to greet the battery commander. "The battle is practically over. Now enemy forces under Liu Kan are coming this way. Our men are mopping up and taking prisoners; we have to pull out right away. The administrative units are leaving any minute, and the prisoners have to be sent north. We'll give you a guide. You go straight to Reed Knoll. It's too crowded here. . . ." He turned and walked away

before the commander or the political instructor had a chance to ask him any questions.

The battery commander relaxed and heaved a comfortable sigh. Affectionately, he grasped both of Shih Defu's hands.

"We certainly owe you a lot today. Come with us to Reed Knoll and rest. We'll see to it that you get to the first aid station. All right?"

"We'll get you there tomorrow at the latest," guaranteed the political instructor. "You'll be able to eat with us. Don't hold back. . . ."

Shih Defu stood and pondered. The battle was over. He thought of Shih Yungkung; there was still no telling what had happened to him. If he, Shih Defu, went off with the battery, it would be difficult to guess when he could return to Shajya Village. He ought to get word to Phoenix and his mother somehow too, so that they wouldn't worry. But suppose he left the battery? Liu Kan's troops were moving up. There was sure to be a great confusing movement of men and animals. Where could he go?

"All right," he decided. "I'll go along with you."

A middle-aged local peasant came up to serve as guide. The political instructor led him to the rear of the column, the battery about-faced and started down again. Shih Defu mounted his mule, and rode beside the commander. The two men chatted amiably.

From the ravine, they marched into the big gorge. Night had fallen, and the iron shoes of the mules struck sparks on the stony road.

Shajya Village glowed red in the dark as they approached it through the upper gorge. Fires were burning everywhere. The commander told Shih Defu that the troops were cooking in anticipation of departure. The battery soon entered the village. On the slope, in the courtyards, on both sides of the street—Shajya Village was filled with sleeping soldiers. Seated on his mule, Shih Defu could hear comrades running back and forth, shouting that they were unable to find any grain.

"Not one peasant has come back. . . ."

"Where have they all gone? . . ."

"What are we going to do? The men haven't eaten all day. . . ."

Shih Defu made up his mind—he wasn't going to Reed Knoll. "Comrade Battery Commander," he said, "help me dismount, quick!"

"What's up?"

"I've got to find grain for them. There's not a soul left in the village. How can I watch the troops go hungry before my eyes?"

"Oh!" The battery commander was in a dilemma. Should he let him do it? Shih Defu was seriously hurt and he had been through an exhausting day, pointing out their target and acting as guide. Still, the commander knew how difficult it was for the troops when they couldn't find any local people.

"Can you make it?" he asked. "You don't want to work yourself into a collapse!"

"I don't collapse that easy!" Shih Defu was in a lather of impatience; he was practically ready to throw himself off the mule. "My guess is that you're a Party member too. I don't have to explain. Just help me get down!" Then he shouted toward the village at the top of his voice, "A Shajya Village man has come back!"

The battery commander was a tough soldier. His character was a little like the powerful steel field guns whose fire he directed. He was seldom moved emotionally, but he was moved now. As he supported Shih Defu down from the mule, he almost wept. He tightly grasped Shih Defu's hands in his own, and looked around at the weary fighters sleeping under the sky.

"Comrade," said the battery commander in a voice that trembled, "our victories come to us the hard way! There are plenty of bitter struggles ahead. My name is Cheng Ming. I hope you'll live for the sake of the Party and the people. Maybe in the future we can meet again. . . ."

Then Shih Defu was surrounded and swept away by a crowd of happy shouting comrades.

* * *

At the same time it was engaged with the enemy Thirty-sixth Division around Shajya Village, the Third Column of the Field Army, in combination with the 4th and 6th Militia Regiments of the Sweideh Region, launched operations to stop the 12th and 55th Brigades under Liu Kan driving west from Wulungpu in an attempt to rescue the Thirty-sixth. The Third Column fought fiercely. It even scattered Liu Kan's detachment of guards and very nearly captured the scoundrel himself. But the enemy 90th Division, leaving one regiment behind to hold occupied Hsia, came up in full force along Liu Kan's right flank. The Third Column was unable to halt the westward advance of the enemy relief troops.

In the vicinity of Shajya Village, after the fighting on Feng Hill was concluded, the battlefield had been hastily combed for enemy arms and equipment, and prisoners were rounded up, then the Field Army troops made camp for the night. It was dark, the men were tired, and they had to prepare for more fighting.

The men billeted in Shajya Village itself belonged to the 9th Regiment of the 8th Brigade. Most of them had been unable to find any grain; a few began to boil pumpkin for soup. Shih Defu's announcement was greeted with joy. Scores of comrades thronged around him, requesting that he show them where the grain was.

"You've got to dig!" Shih Defu scolded. He pointed in a wide circle with his staff. "The grain wasn't moved far. If it's not in the secret caves, it's in the cellars. I can't believe with so many people you haven't been able to turn any up!"

In the dark, many comrades cried in reply, "Since when have we soldiers had the right to dig up the peasants' things!"

"Aiya!" Shih Defu was very dissatisfied. "Are you just going to stand around and starve? Come with me!"

A crowd of delighted comrades trailed after him. Three or four flashlight beams lighted his way as though he were an important leader. Shih Defu said they should dig up his family's grain first, then that of other Communist cadres. If this should prove to be insufficient, they could turn to the homes of the ordinary peasants. The government could find means of replacing the grain after the enemy left. Shih Defu asked the comrades what they thought of his suggestion—was it in keeping with "policy"? A comrade walking beside him slapped him affectionately on the back. Shih Defu flinched, and in the ensuing conversation the story of Shih Defu's recent ordeal gradually came out. The comrades were more strongly drawn to him than ever.

The caves and compound where Shih Defu lived were filled with troops. As he entered the courtyard, they asked him what he wanted. One of the comrades who had come with him, explained.

"Go look somewhere else!" said the soldiers. "All the grain from this place is in the pot already!"

"What do you mean by digging up the peasants' grain without permission!" demanded a comrade at Shih Defu's side.

Another comrade was curt and to the point, "You've broken regulations!"

"We wrote a IOU. What regulations did we break?"

"The owner of the house is here with us. Who did you give the IOU to?"

The argument waxed hot. A soldier pushed his way forward and asked Shih Defu, "Countryman, how much grain did you have in your cellar?"

"Forget it." It seemed to Shih Defu that the quarrel was growing worse. He turned to the comrades with him. "We'll search elsewhere. The tougher things get, the more we all have to work together. All this squabbling is only delaying the fighters from eating. . . ."

"Nothing doing!" insisted the soldier. "Nobody's going to pin any labels on us! Tell us how much grain you had!"

"Speak up!" A comrade behind Shih Defu prodded him. "Otherwise they'll say we're bluffing!"

"Let's get this clear!"

"We had five *tou** of millet and six *tou* of black beans . . ." said Shih Defu.

"That's right! That's correct!" soldiers all over the courtyard shouted. Immediately, several of them played their flashlights on the cellar in the corner of the compound, and one soldier climbed down and fished out a IOU from an empty jug. He showed it to Shih Defu and his comrade—it was also correct!

* Approximately one peck.

The serious atmosphere dissipated at once. Everyone laughed. The comrades who had come with Shih Defu smiled and said it was an ingenious method; the soldiers replied that naturally getting permission from a native of the village was much better. Explanations were given on both sides; Shih Defu accepted the IOU, and led his group off to dig for grain.

Shih Defu reflected on how different these men were from the Hu Tsung-nan soldiers who had been his captors the night before! Walking along, he looked at the fighters lying out in the open, waiting for food without a word of complaint, and his heart was flooded with warmth—they were all for the people. . . .

Under his direction, the army comrades unearthed cellars and secret caches, and after removing the grain, sealed them up again. They collected a total of over seven piculs, including the one Shih Defu had concealed with Shih Yungkung at the last minute clean-up of the grain station. The army comrades gave him an itemized IOU. Shih Defu didn't seem the least like an injured man as he led them vigorously from place to place, intent on seeing to it that the fighters should not go hungry. He congratulated himself on having checked the caches and cellars of the whole village and helped the villagers move their grain to safer concealment the night of the seventeenth. Otherwise he wouldn't know so readily just where to dig.

But in spite of everyone's haste and enthusiasm, it wasn't until nearly midnight that all the troops had finished eating.

Shih Defu was very satisfied. With the exception of Phoenix's family, all the grain was taken from the homes of Party members. Shih Defu had been a little hesitant about digging at her place. In view of his relationship with her and the fact that she had applied to join the Party, there should have been no question about it. Only two nights ago, she had quite properly led Field Army men to his house for a jug of cooking oil. But her parents were so narrow-minded. He wondered whether taking their grain wouldn't prejudice them against him still further, make them even more opposed to his match with Phoenix. But after thinking it over, Shih Defu had decided it was wrong of him to consider the problem only from the point of how it might affect him personally. . . .

As he sat on the threshing ground, eating with a company quartermaster, an army comrade approached him and addressed him in a local accent.

"Countryman, there's a girl named Orchid in your village. Do you know where she's gone?"

Shih Defu stared in surprise. "Where are you from, comrade?"

"Majya Ridge. My name is Jin Pao."

"Oh. . . ." This must be Company Commander Jin Pao, Orchid's fiancé! What a fine looking fellow he was! No wonder Orchid had looked so happy that time she came back after visiting him. . . . Shih Defu couldn't be bothered with eating any more.

"I heard that Orchid was at the first aid station, only five *li* from here, working with the nurses. She's probably still there now. If you want to see her, I'll take you there when you've finished eating." Shih Defu forgot his pain in his eagerness to bring joy to the couple. Orchid and Phoenix were such good friends. The older girl was like a sister, always helping Phoenix to progress.

Company Commander Jin Pao's laugh was a bit strained. "We're too busy. That's not possible. As long as I know she's all right...."

Several comrades laughed with him. This was the first time they had heard that Comrade Jin Pao's future wife was from Shajya Village. Shih Defu told him how excellently Orchid was doing in her study and in her work. He praised her so highly that Jin Pao became embarrassed. The company commander rather regretted having asked about her in the first place.

Just then someone was heard calling Shih Defu's name.

"He's over here," a comrade shouted. "He's here, eating!"

Shih Defu promptly began shovelling down the contents of his bowl with the twigs he was using as makeshift chopsticks. He presumed the troops would start moving again after their meal and that he was needed for some information. A bodyguard armed with a Mauser pistol and a carbine came up. He said the regimental officers were inviting Shih Defu to eat with them in the district office where they had set up their headquarters. The bodyguard, a shining faced youngster whose appearance belied his utter fearlessness, started to haul Shih Defu by the arm.

"No, no, no...." Shih Defu felt he would be ill at ease eating with high ranking cadres, and resisted the other's friendly urgings.

"They say you must come," the youngster insisted, still pulling. "They say you really helped us a lot tonight. They heard that you were beaten by the enemy, and after you eat they want the medics to put some medicine on you...."

"All right. I'll go for the medicine." It hadn't occurred to Shih Defu that he could be treated here. He was very pleased. "I wanted to get these wounds fixed all day, but I didn't have any time. Wait till I finish eating and I'll go with you."

The company commander asked the bodyguard, "Have they got any special food to give him?"

"They're eating the same as the rest of us, but there are some American canned stuff picked up after the fighting...."

Urged by the company commander and the quartermaster, Shih Defu gave in. Walking with the bodyguard, he recalled how he had asked his captors for soup and how a Hu Tsung-nan soldier had jeered at him about American canned goods. Now they were wiping out the Hu Tsung-nan forces and he was going to eat some after all. He felt a kind of triumphant pride!

The regimental officers had already finished eating when Shih Defu entered the district office, and the table had been cleared. The *kang* was

crowded with spread maps which the officers were examining in the light of candles held by a couple of cadres.

Leaning over a map, one of the officers was saying, "Liu Kan's 12th Brigade is here; his 55th Brigade is there; the 90th Division is on this side. Although Tung Chao's First Division is advancing along the highway, they're travelling on foot too. They probably will reach Chenchuan by tomorrow morning. Tonight our forces will rest where they are; we'll march before dawn. Let each battalion dispatch cadres to collect grain...."

The bodyguard had asked Shih Defu to wait at the door. When the officer finished speaking, the bodyguard reported to the regimental commander. The latter, a pistol strapped to his side, at once came forward and warmly shook Shih Defu's hand.

"We're very grateful to you! Thank you very much for your help!" And he said with added emphasis, "We've heard about what you've done. Good! Good comrade! Good cadre!" He lifted Shih Defu's shirt and looked at the wounds on his back, then he said to the bodyguard, "Take him and give him something to eat. After he's finished, have them dress his injuries at the infirmary. He can sleep there tonight; let him travel with the medics." The regimental commander turned back to Shih Defu. "The enemy is moving up from the east and the south. It would be dangerous for you to remain here. You go with us and we'll get you to a hospital. . . ."

The commander was so competent and cheerful, he spoke with such decisiveness, it was impossible for Shih Defu to doubt a word he said. The other officers looked at Shih Defu affectionately. They asked him how old he was, and said he was a very promising young man.

"He's a model of the Party and the people!" beamed the regimental commander. "Go and eat, quickly. We still have some things to discuss here."

Shih Defu hesitated. "Comrade," he said, "going with you would be fine. But one of our grain station cadres has disappeared. And then there's the IOU the troops gave me tonight for the grain. I really ought to report these things to my district office."

"Where are you going to find it in all this confusion?" laughed the officers.

"Comrade," the regimental commander said seriously, "fulfilling responsibility is a very good thing. But one has to be flexible according to the situation. If you go running blindly about and the enemy nabs you again, that won't be so good! Go on and eat now. . . ."

Shih Defu had no choice but to go with the bodyguard into the next cave where the food was being prepared. Later, his wounds were dressed in the infirmary.

Before dawn, he set out together with the troops.

XIX

Orchid and Phoenix didn't finish help tending the wounded at the 8th Brigade first-aid station until very late at night. Then, in the starlight, the medical unit, like all other units which used pack animals to transport heavy equipment, moved north to make room for the slowly withdrawing Field Army troops. Superior enemy forces, coming from two directions, were bearing down. The nurses urged the local women volunteer assistants to travel with the medical unit; they could return home after the enemy left. Many of the women departed with the medics, but Phoenix remained behind. She had learned of Shih Defu's whereabouts when the first-aid station sent a stretcher for him to the mountain hamlet after the battle. Then the stretcher had returned empty; Staff Officer Shao and his entire unit were gone. All Phoenix knew was what the stretcher bearers had learned from the women in the hamlet—after noon, Shih Defu had gone off with the artillery battery as a guide to the hill south of Shajya Village.

There is nothing unusual about a girl being in love; but when this love is combined with a revolutionary determination, when these elements strengthen and develop each other—a powerful force is created. (This was something Phoenix's mother had never understood; to her, Phoenix was simply "bewitched.")

Phoenix insisted on staying behind. She wanted to see Shih Defu's wounds, she wanted to know how serious they were. They must be serious if a stretcher had to be sent for him; yet he had found the strength to act as guide for the artillery battery. What a lovable boy he was! Even if he should be crippled, thought Phoenix, or be minus an arm like Pa Hu, or even if his face should be disfigured, she still would love him. Of course this would make winning over her parents even harder!

Orchid could tell what was going on in her friend's mind. She decided to go with Phoenix to Shajya Village. If Shih Defu could not be found, they would catch up with the medical unit together. Though separated from Shajya Village only by five *li*, they discovered that traveling alone at night was out of the question. They were challenged by sentries as soon as they tried to leave the village. There was a strict military curfew; batches of prisoners were still being escorted north. They had no choice but to remain in the village until dawn.

At daybreak they arrived in Shajya Village. Not only the artillery, even the infantry had gone. Old folks, women and children from all the surrounding villages, realizing that the cliff caves were no longer safe, were trooping through the gorge past Shajya Village on their way north. The girls couldn't find a shadow of Shih Defu. Everyone said a large enemy force was approaching. They heard it was a few dozen *li* long. . . .

The girls spent all morning in Shajya Village looking for the white-bearded old man. He might know about Shih Defu. But combing the

whole village produced no sign of him. Finally, from the pool of dried blood outside his compound gate, they concluded the old man probably had been killed by the enemy. But if he had stubbornly met his end, where was his body? The girls searched high and low, and at last found it bricked up with stones in a cache above the old man's cave home. They assumed the Field Army troops had brought it to this temporary haven. They wept as they viewed the determined expression on the old man's face through the cracks between the stones.

Now there was no way of inquiring where Shih Defu had gone. They set out in pursuit of the 8th Brigade medical unit.

On the road the girls were overtaken by army comrades leading peasants who carried small field pieces. The men walked very quickly, as though the enemy were right behind them. Their shoulders swollen by the pressure of the heavy weights, the peasants were dripping perspiration. The army comrades took turns at shouldering the carrying poles to spell the peasant porters. They told the girls the enemy had already come past Feng Hill in the south, and in the east they were spreading north from Changgow Hill. Machinegun fire could be heard. . . .

The girls were swept along in the stream of hurrying porters through the big gorge that led north to Cedar Rise. They caught up with the 8th Brigade medics in a village past Aijya Ditch. The Field Army had already set up a rear line defense along that line. It was nearly noon when the girls arrived. The medical unit was just about to move to the rear of the combat troops. Had the girls come any later, they would have had a great deal of trouble finding it.

Most exasperating of all, the girls learned that Shih Defu had come through this very village about breakfast time. The 9th Regiment had sent him by stretcher to the Brigade medics for them to give him the necessary papers to get into an army hospital. Before leaving with his introductions, Shih Defu had turned over to the local women the grain IOU the 9th Regiment had given him in Shajya Village the previous night. He told them to give it to Orchid for transmission to the district government. He left word for Orchid that he had seen Jin Pao in Shajya Village and that the latter had asked about her. Shih Defu had also deputed the women to tell Phoenix to do a good job of supporting the army; she shouldn't worry about him. That the doctors said he would be well in two or three weeks; if the enemy was gone by then, he would come back. The only thing that bothered him was not knowing what had happened to Shih Yungkung. . . .

After Phoenix inquired in detail about Shih Defu's wounds, she sighed faintly. The stone which had been weighing on her heart for two days dropped away, and she felt much easier. She left with the other women to continue helping the nurses in the medical unit.

* * *

The destruction of the Thirty-sixth Division was such a heavy blow to Hu Tsung-nan that he concentrated all his northern forces in a wild drive against the Northwest Field Army. Liu Kan and his five brigades were pulled back from the banks of the Yellow River; after passing Shajya Village, they split up and advanced toward Cedar Rise. Tung Chao's 78th Brigade had returned from Wubow to join with other units of the so-called "Ace First Division." The latter had gone along the Wuding River from Sweideh to occupy Chenchuan, and from there had moved north into Wujwang district, intending to encircle the Field Army from the west. In only three days, the Hu Tsung-nan forces had been forced to drop their claim of "complete administrative control in Shensi Province," and to begin a new dangerous gamble.

Lying on a stretcher, Shih Defu continued toward Cedar Rise. This was on his way to a Field Army hospital in Hsia county. The roads and paths were crowded with women and children leaving the threatened villages, and the stretcher bearers often had to wait some time at the crossroads to get through. The result was that they didn't approach Cedar Rise till past noon. Fortunately, it had been cloudy all morning and no planes had appeared. But just as they drew near Cedar Rise things grew very tense. Machineguns began to chatter on the hills to the south.

Peasants, leading their children and carrying baskets full of personal belongings, were fleeing south from Wujwang district in the face of Tung Chao's drive along the Field Army's right flank. When they heard the firing to the south, they all turned and ran north. Because this was mountainous terrain and cross-country travel off the roads was not feasible, the narrow paths up to Cedar Rise were jammed tight. The stretcher bearers were from the western border area of Shensi. Unfamiliar with local geography, they were very worried. They asked Shih Defu whether there wasn't some other route to get him to his destination.

"No. We've got to go through Cedar Rise," Shih Defu explained. "Going down the other side of the hill from Cedar Rise is a broad river valley. That won't be so crowded. . . ."

When they finally got through to the village they found that all of the service and administrative units had long since left. A newly arrived combat unit was re-laying telephone wires. Shih Defu's stretcher was placed by the side of the road in the middle of the village, while the two bearers entered a compound to ask the peasants for a bowl of rice gruel. This they gave to Shih Defu to eat with some dry ration. They themselves dined on cold water and roasted rice.

An endless stream of refugees flowed through the village. At the crossroads in the center, many people went north, others turned east toward the river valley.

A peasant of about fifty, a piece of boiled pumpkin in each hand, came walking against the current, eating as he walked. An army comrade strode behind him. As they neared Shih Defu, the latter

recognized the peasant. The man was a native of Cedar Rise who came to sell salt in Shajya Village every market day.

"Uncle," Shih Defu hailed him. "When did Secretary Jin and the others leave here? Where did they go?"

The peasant halted. The pumpkin slices poised in his hands, he stared at Shih Defu in stupefaction. "You?! Aiya, when Old Chen of the co-op came and told Secretary Jin what happened, they all figured you were finished! How is it you're still alive?"

"Where did they go?" Shih Defu didn't want to talk about himself. "What did they go to do?" he pressed.

"They were up at the crack of dawn and headed north. Cadres from every *hsiang* were called to collect grain for the army. . . ."

"Finish what you've got to tell him and let's go!" the army comrade urged the peasant.

The peasant offered Shih Defu the piece of pumpkin he had not yet bitten into. When Shih Defu refused, he put it on the stretcher beside Shih Defu's pillow and walked away.

Shih Defu heaved a small sigh. That night Secretary Jin had told him how important it was to wipe out the Thirty-sixth Division. Now there was sure to be more fighting. All the district and *hsiang* cadres were busy collecting grain for the army, but he couldn't take part in the work. He remembered what the commander of the artillery battery had said on parting—there are plenty of bitter struggles ahead. . . .

The sound of firing came nearer. People said that the Field Army was slowly withdrawing in the face of the enemy advance, that they were separated from the enemy only by a gorge. Shih Defu was concerned about Orchid and Phoenix. He wondered whether they had gotten back to the 8th Brigade medical unit. While he was still munching his dry ration, the bearers picked up the stretcher and set out again.

Leaving the village the bearers turned the stretcher around so that Shih Defu would be travelling feet first. Then they descended the hill.

Hsia county began at the foot of the hill. Soldiers posted at a fork in the road were urging the refugees to follow the gorge to the east. In the river valley ahead, there were a number of small villages where they could stay. But the old folks and women, seeing that the telephone lines led toward a hamlet, wanted to go there so that they could be under the protection of the troops. Although the villages in the river valley were fairly close together, the refugees didn't think they would be safe because they clustered around a town—a probable enemy objective. If the soldiers were billeted in all the hamlet's cave homes, they would gladly live in the compounds or in the open fields if necessary, said the peasants, just so long as they could be together with the army.

Cadres from the county office of the abandoned Chenchuan circulated among the refugees explaining the situation—there were no longer any enemy in Wulungpu; there was only one enemy regiment in Hsia, and

it didn't dare to come out. Besides, Field Army troops were close to the town in the river valley. . . .

"If you believe in our army's strength, you should believe its word."

"The further southeast you go, the safer you'll be. The enemy's concentrating all his forces to come this way. . . ."

"We're telling you this to help you, not to hurt you!"

Convinced, the mass of refugees continued along the gorge. Shih Defu's stretcher bearers, who had been resting, now prepared to climb the hill ahead. Sentries checked everyone carefully, even army comrades. At the fork in the road the sentries examined Shih Defu's letter of introduction to the hospital and his travel permit. The stretcher was allowed to proceed.

Dark clouds concealed the sun completely, but Shih Defu and the stretcher bearers estimated it was the time when the peasants usually had their noonday rest.

Though the hill they were climbing was only on the other side of the gorge from Cedar Rise, it was enveloped in an entirely different atmosphere. Peaceful, serene, even the crops seemed to have another look about them. It was as though the entire area had just been painted in bright fresh water colors. Troops occupied the surrounding hills, but not a sound could be heard. There was a deep soft stillness everywhere. Telephone lines snaked along the ground in all directions. From the stretcher, Shih Defu observed the solemn mien of the sentries at the various crossroads. He guessed that they must be performing some very special duty.

The road skirted the hamlet on the hill, then swooped down again close to a village. As the stretcher team drew nearer, Shih Defu could see many sleek saddled horses and mules tethered all through the village. Guards were posted at close intervals. In the ravine leading past the village, sentries stood a few dozen paces from each other. The first one stopped the stretcher bearers and courteously questioned them. After looking over their credentials, he said in a low voice:

"The medical department is in the next village. Try to go a little faster."

The stretcher bearers increased their pace. They knew there must be an important military organization in the village, and they gave up their idea of resting after coming down the hill. Shih Defu was very excited. Raising his head, he suddenly saw a group of men coming out of a large compound gate. Most of them wore the brown military uniform; the uniforms of some were grey. The men shook hands with each other and said goodbye. Guards began untying the horses and mules.

About a dozen people descended the slope. At their head was a tall stalwart man in the grey uniform of an ordinary cadre. As he walked he listened carefully to the respectful words of a comrade walking beside him. From time to time, he nodded his head. Among the group, Shih



Hsu Pei-HUNG: A Spring Shower on the River

Defu first recognized Comrade Chou En-lai, whom he had heard address the victory rally at Chenwu Caves. And then he realized who the man strolling at the head of the procession must be. Shih Defu's whole body glowed with warmth. In a voice that he checked just in time from becoming a shout, he cried:

"Chairman Mao! . . ."

A grove of date trees blocked his view. The stretcher continued on.

* * *

Chairman Mao and the Central Committee of the Communist Party, in order to make it easier for the Northwest Field Army to wipe out the Thirty-sixth Division, had drawn Hu Tsung-nan's main forces to the fording point of the Yellow River near Hsia. Their original plan was to lure the enemy still further to the north of Hsia. But because of the heavy rains of the eighteenth, they were unable to cross the swollen Hsialu River which ran athwart their northern route and emptied into the Yellow River to the east. Moreover, Liu Kan and his 90th Division had already reached a point twenty *li* south of Hsia, and his advance unit was only a hill away from the Central Committee and the guard force accompanying it. Chairman Mao therefore turned west and followed along the south bank of the Hsialu River to a village twenty *li* behind the headquarters post of General Peng Teh-huai. That morning, Chairman Mao together with Comrades Chou En-lai and Jen Pi-shih attended a meeting of officers of brigade rank and above called by the headquarters command.

Spirits were particularly high at the meeting because of the great victory over the Thirty-sixth Division. The commanding generals were full of confidence. The peasants had been completely mobilized to support the front, and they were requesting that the Field Army continue to lure the enemy north and demolish Liu Kan and Tung Chao; better still, capture one of them alive. The chief problem of the Field Army at the time was that it lacked grain. Three thousand piculs were required before it could fight another battle, and they were needed immediately. Chairman Mao asked detailed questions of Comrade Liu Ching-fan, vice-chairman of the Shensi-Kansu-Ningsia Border Area and concurrently commander of the Northwest Field Army service force, and of Sweideh Region's Commissioner Geh. They indicated seven districts in Michih and Hsia counties where they suggested grain could be raised.

After understanding the entire situation, Chairman Mao agreed to this proposal. He pointed out that Hu Tsung-nan would not necessarily risk a very deep penetration, and that the enemy might stage a general withdrawal before the grain was collected. In any event, the meeting decided that the Chenchuan independent battalion should escort the grain-raising cadres to the seven districts that same night, and directed the 4th and 6th Militia Regiments of the Sweideh Region to protect those who went to the countryside east of Michih.

It was this meeting that was breaking up as Shih Defu went by on the stretcher. The military cadres were returning to their respective posts. The officer speaking to Chairman Mao was Comrade Liu Ching-fan. He was replying to a question of the Chairman as to the morale of the civilian porters. Walking behind Liu was Commissioner Geh, but Shih Defu did not see him.

At the next village, about 10,000 civilian grain porters were waiting for the decisions of the meeting. This sea of people was getting ready to move when Shih Defu arrived. In and around the village, in the gorge and on the slopes—everywhere were strong young peasants. Those whose headkerchief towels were knotted in front were from north Shensi; those whose head coverings were knotted behind came from along the Yellow River in the Shansi-Suiyuan Border Area. Above, the sky was dark and ominous, but as yet no rain fell. An eagle soared majestically between two peaks.

The stretcher bearers placed Shih Defu down a dozen paces off the road that ran beside the river flats. Getting through this crowd would be difficult with a stretcher, and the bearers needed a rest after their last forced march. Taking Shih Defu's letter of introduction, they wended their way toward the village in search of the medical department.

Shih Defu could hardly lie still on the stretcher. He was seized with the same excitement he had felt when he attended the victory rally at Chenwu Caves after the Panlung campaign. But this was no victory rally, for the enemy was sweeping up from the south. Shih Defu knew that here he was witnessing the beginning of a great new drive! The troops were holding the front; the masses were taking care of the rear, and Chairman Mao was here too! For the sake of the people he was staying and fighting it out in northern Shensi, and right on the front line of the battle! Shih Defu was very agitated. Did he have to be sent to the hospital on a stretcher on account of a few little flesh wounds?

The doctor who dressed his wounds at the infirmary of the 9th Regiment had warned him that he couldn't recover for three months if he didn't go to a hospital. "In the hospital you'll be cured in three weeks," the doctor had said. "You may understand fighting in the revolution, but you don't know anything about medical science. . . ."

"I don't believe it!" Shih Defu still didn't want to go to the hospital. It wasn't stubbornness; seeing Chairman Mao here, he felt that even dying for the revolution would be a small matter!

Suddenly, he was aware of a tenseness spreading among the men near the bend in the gorge. The words flew in a low tone from one person to the next:

"Chairman Mao!"

"Chairman Mao!"

"Chairman Mao!"

And then he appeared. The masses along the river flats separated to make a path for him. Chairman Mao walked slowly, chatting with

Comrades Chou En-lai and Jen Pi-shih. His iron-grey horse and the other mounts were led by comrades a short distance behind. Smiling his characteristically kindly smile, with wise and shining eyes Chairman Mao looked at the endless sea of honest peasant faces stretching on both sides of him. The strength of these peasant masses was the infallible basis of the victory of the People's Liberation Army.

Shih Defu had long since left his stretcher and stood up. Now, not satisfied with his view, he climbed to the top of a big boulder. It was slippery and he slid off. He climbed up again. His mouth was open in a wide happy smile. Shih Defu had never dreamed that he would be so close to Chairman Mao. He could see Commissioner Geh too, walking with dignity in the rear of the group.

Chairman Mao stopped and stood among the masses. He seemed about to speak to them. Shih Defu was deeply moved to see how stirred he was. Chairman Mao stretched forth his powerful hand in a habitual gesture, and to the thousands gazing at him with boundless veneration, he called:

"You're being put to a lot of trouble, friends! Victory depends on you!"

Tears sprang to the eyes of many a civilian porter. Not knowing what to say, the peasants nodded awkwardly. A broad-faced man about forty who was a bit more outspoken than the others, from their midst then shouted with pride in his leader:

"What does it matter if we put out a little effort? The Chairman's strategy is great. . . ."

Chairman Mao smiled.

"It's the strength of the people that's great. Without the people's strength, any strategy is useless." Chairman Mao turned toward Comrades Chou En-lai and Jen Pi-shih, and they smiled in grave assent.

His powerful figure leaning slightly forward, in his usual solicitous manner he asked the peasants about their livelihood and how the army was looking after them. They all expressed their satisfaction.

"Our fighters are just like one family with us. . . ."

Staring, Shih Defu strained to hear every word Chairman Mao said. Then, somewhere among the thousands, a man raised the rallying cry, "Long live Chairman Mao!" Shih Defu shot up his arm and joined in the shout:

"Long live Chairman Mao!"

"Long live Chairman Mao!"

"Long live Chairman Mao!"

And the cry spread—from the roofs of the caves to the cliff-side shelves, from the hill slopes to the rolling fields. There was a forest of clenched fists, rising and falling, as far as the eye could see. People were jumping with excitement. The strident yells of peasants rocked the hills. Wave after wave of "Long live Chairman Mao!" thunderously drowned out all other sound.

And the clear Hunan accent of Chairman Mao was like a bright responding clarion. "Long live our civilian porter comrades!" he cried several times; then he and his close comrades in battle waved their hands to the cheering masses, and walked on through the crowded gorge and up a stony road. Only after Chairman Mao and his companions had mounted their horses and departed did the tumultuous shouting gradually die away.

Chairman Mao was gone—but he left with the people an unforgettable inspiration and encouragement. This was the most potent of all mobilizations for battle.

Shortly afterwards, the thousands of civilian porters and the cadres in charge of raising grain set out for the seven districts of Michih and Hsia counties. The two stretcher bearers returned from the medical department and said Shih Defu was to go to Field Army Hospital Number Three. It was twenty-five *li* away, but they could make it before dark if they hurried. Seeing the army of grain porters marching off, Shih Defu was reluctant to be left behind. Finally, however, in response to the urging of the stretcher bearers, he got back on to the litter, and they continued their journey.

At a crowded crossroad, Shih Defu suddenly saw Secretary Jin. He shouted to him, and bid the stretcher bearers halt.

Jin was holding a staff in his hand. His homespun blue cloth knapsack was on his back. He was busily making last minute arrangements with the group of civilian porters who were about to depart with him. Hearing his name called, he looked all around, then, seeing no one, returned to the business at hand. Shih Defu frantically asked the bearers to set the stretcher down, and again he shouted with all his might. Jin already was lost in the crowd.

"Secretary Jin! It's me—Shih Defu!"

"What? Where are you?"

"Over here—"

Jin squeezed his way out of the mass of porters and rushed to Shih Defu's side.

"Aiya! You're still alive! Lie down, quickly. Don't get up."

He squatted beside the stretcher and seized both of Shih Defu's hands in his own.

"I'm alive, but Shih Yungkung is gone . . ." Shih Defu said unhappily.

"Humph," Jin looked annoyed. "He's here. . . ."

"What! Then he got away?"

"That night he nearly died of fright! He spat blood a couple of times as he ran. He didn't even go to Aijya Ditch; he went directly to his father-in-law's village and stayed in the old man's house. Today, the leader of Fifth *Hsiang* and the political instructor finally got him to come here with them. I criticized him and ordered him to collect grain with the others. Whether he will remain in the Party or not depends on how he acts this time," Jin said solemnly. Then Jin's face brightened

and he said animatedly, "Hey, let me tell you. Commissioner Geh heard Vice-Chairman Liu say that Vice Commander-in-Chief Peng Teh-huai knows all about how a few village cadres saved over a hundred piculs of grain in Shajya Village so that the army was able to eat when it got there. General Peng was full of praise for you men! How are your injuries? Not serious, I hope?"

"Flesh wounds. They don't matter. I don't want to go to the hospital, but the army comrades insist," Shih Defu said briefly, then he hastened to ask, "Did Old Chen turn over the grain station account books?"

"He gave them to district clerk Shang some time ago. He and Jang, that kid who's his clerk, are moving all the co-op stuff north. You mustn't think of work any more. Let me see your wounds. . . ."

"There's nothing to see. They're all bandaged anyhow. Stinker Huai-tsung told the enemy who I was, and they beat me!" Shih Defu ground his teeth.

"Aha! So that was his work, eh? Good! Our district guerillas have nabbed him. District chief Tsow and the others brought him in this morning. We sent him on up north."

"What!" Shih Defu sat up in pleased surprise, and struggled to get off the stretcher. "Where are they?"

Jin pushed him back. "Lie down now. Old Tsow and the rest are going out with the civilian porters too. They've got no time to talk to you. I'll tell you about them, briefly. With only about twenty guerillas they rounded up over one hundred and seventy enemy deserters. They picked up more than one hundred small arms and about thirty horses and mules besides. Stinker Huai-tsung was running for Michih with a few dozen enemy soldiers when they caught him. . . ."

"District chief Tsow is really all right at a time like this!" chortled Shih Defu.

Jin smiled. "Yes, Old Tsow is a good comrade! Last night they heard that Liu Kan had arrived with reinforcements. The guerillas had exposed themselves and become too big a target, so Tsow sent word to the county Party committee, and brought his men up here during the night. They lost thirty prisoners on the road. . . ."

"Comrade Jin! Comrade Jin! Everyone's here now. Let's go!" came a shout from Jin's group of porters.

"Coming, coming!" Jin called back. Affectionately, he shook both of Shih Defu's hands. "Go to the hospital and have a good rest. We'll have a long talk when you come back. The district we're going to is more than a hundred *li* from here. I'll be seeing you. . . ."

Jin stood up, took a last look at Shih Defu, and walked away. Envy-ing the district Party secretary his opportunity to work right up until victory, Shih Defu stared after his retreating figure. An instant later, Jin was swallowed up by the bustling crowd and was gone.

* * *

The military situation developed entirely in accordance with Chairman Mao's remarkable foresight.

On the 23rd of August, People's Liberation Army generals Chen and Hsieh led their forces south across the Yellow River* along the section that stretches several hundred *li* from southern Shansi to northern Honan. The eastern column of the army pressed on Loyang; the western column drove toward Tung Kuan,** Hu Tsung-nan grew panicky; Chiang Kai-shek hastily took a plane to Sian, while Hu's major northwest forces under Liu Kan and Tung Chao were floundering around on the line between Wujwang and Cedar Rise, way up in northern Shensi.

Three days later, Liu and Tung began a general withdrawal. By then the grain raised in the seven districts of Michih and Hsia counties was pouring in to the quartermasters of the Northwest Field Army. The latter then split into two columns and raced ahead of the enemy toward the south. On the tenth of September, the columns rejoined outside of Yenchuan, five hundred *li* south of their starting point. Another three days after that, when the Field Army's battle positions were all prepared, the Hu Tsung-nan forces finally caught up.

Between the fourteenth and sixteenth of September, four Hu Tsung-nan brigades were annihilated in the famous battle of Chakou.

But that is another story.

*The river, after flowing south between Shensi and Shansi, turns at the northern boundary of Honan and flows east to the sea.

**Tung Kuan is on the railway line leading due west to Sian, capital of Shensi. At that time Sian was the headquarters of Hu Tsung-nan.

The Shop of the Lin Family

Mao Tun

I

Miss Lin's small mouth was pouting when she returned home from school that day. She flung down her books, and instead of combing her hair and powdering her nose before the mirror as usual, she stretched out on the bed. Her eyes staring at the top of the bed canopy, Miss Lin lay lost in thought. Her little cat leaped up beside her, snuggled against her waist and miaow-ed twice. Automatically, she patted his head, then rolled over and buried her face in the pillow.

"Ma!" called Miss Lin.

No answer. Ma, whose room was right next door, ordinarily doted on this only daughter of hers. On hearing her return, Ma would come swaying in to ask whether she was hungry. Ma would be keeping something good for her. Or she might send the maid out to buy a bowl of hot soup with meat dumplings from a street vendor. . . . But today was odd. There obviously were people talking in Ma's room — Miss Lin could hear Ma hiccuping too — yet Ma didn't even reply.

Again Miss Lin rolled over on the bed, and raised her head. She would eavesdrop on this conversation. Whom could Ma be talking to, that voices had to be kept so low?

But she couldn't make out what they were saying. Only Ma's continuous hiccups wafted intermittently to Miss Lin's ears. Suddenly, Ma's voice rose, as if she were angry, and a few words came through quite clearly:

"— These are Japanese goods, those are Japanese goods, hic! . . ."

Miss Lin started. She prickled all over, like when she was having a hair-cut and the tiny shorn hairs stuck to her neck. She had come home annoyed just because they had laughed at her and scolded her at school over Japanese goods. She swept aside the little cat nestled against her, jumped up and stripped off her new azure rayon dress lined with camel's wool. She shook it out a couple of times, and sighed. Miss Lin had heard that this charming frock was made of Japanese material. She

tossed it aside and pulled that cute cowhide case out from under the bed. Almost spitefully, she flipped the cover open, and turning the case upside down, dumped its contents on the bed. A rainbow of brightly colored dresses and knickknacks rolled and spread. The little cat leaped to the floor, whirled and jumped up on a chair, where he crouched and looked at his mistress in astonishment.

Miss Lin sorted through the pile of clothes, then stood, abstracted, beside the bed. The more she examined her belongings, the more she adored them — and the more they looked like Japanese goods! Couldn't she wear any of them? She hated to part with them—besides, her father wouldn't necessarily be willing to have new ones made for her! Miss Lin's eyes began to smart. She loved these Japanese things, while she hated the Japanese aggressors who invaded the Northeast Provinces. If not for that, she could wear Japanese merchandise and no one would say a word.

"Hic —"

The sound came through the door, followed by the thin swaying body of Mrs. Lin. The sight of the heap of clothing on the bed, and her daughter, bemused, standing in only her brief woolen underwear, was more than a little shock. As her excitement increased, the tempo of Mrs. Lin's hiccups grew in proportion. For the moment, she was unable to speak. Miss Lin, grief written all over her face, flew to her mother. "Ma! They're all Japanese goods. What am I going to wear tomorrow?"

Hiccuping, Mrs. Lin shook her head. With one hand she supported herself on her daughter's shoulder, with the other she kneaded her own chest. After a while, she managed to force out a few sentences.

"Child — hic — why have you taken off — hic — all your clothes? The weather's cold — hic — This trouble of mine — hic — began the year you were born. Hic — lately it's getting worse! Hic —"

"Ma, tell me what am I going to wear tomorrow? I'll just hide in the house and not go out! They'll laugh at me, swear at me!"

Mrs. Lin didn't answer. Hiccuping steadily, she walked over to the bed, picked the new azure dress out of the pile, and draped it over her daughter. Then she patted the bed in invitation for Miss Lin to sit down. The little cat returned to beside the girl's legs. Cocking his head, with narrowed eyes he looked first at Mrs. Lin, then at her daughter. Lazily, he rolled over and rubbed his belly against the soles of the girl's shoes. Miss Lin kicked him away and reclined sideways on the bed, with her head hidden behind her mother's back.

Neither of them spoke for a while. Mrs. Lin was busy hiccuping; her daughter was busy calculating "how to go out tomorrow." The problem of Japanese goods not only affected everything Miss Lin wore — it influenced everything she used. Even the powder compact which her fellow students so admired and her automatic pencil were probably made in Japan. And she was crazy about those little gadgets!

"Child — hic — are you hungry?"

After sitting quietly for some time, Mrs. Lin gradually controlled her hiccups, and began her usual doting routine.

"No. Ma, why do you always ask me if I'm hungry? The most important thing is that I have no clothes. How can I go to school tomorrow?" the girl demanded petulantly. She was still curled up on the bed, her face still buried behind her mother.

From the start, Mrs. Lin hadn't understood why her daughter kept complaining that she had no clothes to wear. This was the third time and she couldn't ignore the remark any longer, but those damned hiccups most irritatingly started up again. Just then, Mr. Lin came in. He was holding a sheet of paper in his hand; his face was ashen. He saw his wife struggling with continuous agitated hiccups, his daughter lying on the clothing-strewn bed, and he could guess pretty well what was wrong. His brows drew together in a frown.

"Do you have an Anti-Japanese Invasion Society in your school, Hsiu?" he asked Miss Lin. "This letter just came. It says that if you wear clothes made of Japanese material again tomorrow, they're going to burn them! Of all the wild lawless things to say!"

"Hic — hic!"

"What nonsense! Everyone has something made in Japan on him. But they have to pick on our family to make trouble! There isn't a shop carrying foreign goods that isn't full of Japanese stuff. But they have to make our shop the culprit. They insist on locking up our stocks! Huh!"

"Hic — hic — Goddess Kuanyin protect and preserve us! Hic —"

"Papa, I've got an old style padded jacket. It's probably not made of Japanese material, but if I wear it they'll all laugh at me, it's so out of date," said Miss Lin, sitting up on the bed. She had been thinking of going a step farther and asking Mr. Lin to have a dress made for her out of non-Japanese cloth, but his expression decided her against such a rash move. Still, picturing the jeers her old padded jacket would evoke, she couldn't restrain her tears.

"Hic — hic — child! — hic — don't cry — no one will laugh at you — hic — child. . . ."

"Hsiu, you don't have to go to school tomorrow! We soon won't have anything to eat; how can we spend money on schools!" Mr. Lin was exasperated. He ripped up the letter and strode, sighing, from the room. Before long, he came hurrying back.

"Where's the key to the cabinet? Give it to me!" he demanded of his wife.

Mrs. Lin turned pale and stared at him. Her eternal hiccups were momentarily stilled.

"There's no help for it. We'll have to make an offering to those straying demons —" Mr. Lin paused to heave a sigh. "It'll cost me four hundred at most. If the Kuomintang local branch thinks it's not enough, I'll quit doing business. Let them lock up the stocks! That shop opposite

has more Japanese goods than I. They've made an investment of over ten thousand dollars. They paid out only five hundred, and they're going along without a bit of trouble. Five hundred dollars! Just mark it off as a couple of bad debts!—The key! That gold necklace ought to bring about three hundred. . . ."

"Hic — hic — really, like a gang of robbers!" Mrs. Lin produced the key with a trembling hand. Tears streamed down her face. Miss Lin, however, did not cry. She was looking into space with misty eyes, recalling that Kuomintang committeeman who had made a speech at her school, a hateful swarthy pock-marked fellow who stared at her like a hungry dog. She could picture him grasping the gold necklace and jumping for joy, his big mouth open in a laugh. Then she visualized the ugly bandit quarreling with her father, hitting him. . . .

"Aiya!" Miss Lin gave a frightened scream and threw herself on her mother's bosom. Mrs. Lin was so startled she had no time for hic-cups.

"Child, hic — don't cry," Mrs. Lin made a desperate effort to speak. "After New Year your Papa will have money. We'll make a new dress for you, hic — Those black-hearted crooks! They all insist we have money. Hic — we lose more every year. Your Papa was in the fertilizer business, and he lost money, hic — Every penny invested in the shop belongs to other people. Child, hic, hic — this sickness of mine; it makes life hell — hic — In another two years when you're nineteen, we'll find you a good husband. Hic — then I can die in peace! Save us from our adversity, Goddess Kuanyin! Hic —"

II

The following day, Mr. Lin's shop underwent a transformation. All the Japanese goods he hadn't dared to show for the past week, now were the most prominently displayed. In imitation of the big Shanghai stores, Mr. Lin inscribed many slips of colored paper with the words "Big Sale 10% Discount!" and pasted them on his windows. Just seven days before New Year, this was the "rush season" of the shops selling imported goods in the towns and villages. Not only was there hope of earning back Mr. Lin's special expenditure of four hundred dollars; Miss Lin's new dress depended on the amount of business done in the next few days.

A little past ten in the morning, groups of peasants who had come into town to sell their produce in the market began drifting along the street. Carrying baskets on their arms, leading small children, they chatted loud and vigorously as they strolled. They stopped to look at the red and green blurbs pasted on Mr. Lin's windows and called attention to them, women shouting to their husbands, children yelling to their parents, clucking their tongues in admiration over the goods on display in the shop windows. It would soon be New Year. Children were wishing for a pair of new socks. Women remembered that the family wash-basin had been

broken for some time. The single wash-cloth used by the entire family had been bought half a year ago, and now was an old rag. They had run out of soap more than a month before. They ought to take advantage of this "Sale" and buy a few things.

Mr. Lin sat in the cashier's cage, marshalling all his energies, a broad smile plastered on his face. He watched the peasants, while keeping an eye on his two salesmen and two apprentices. With all his heart he hoped to see his merchandise start moving out and the silver dollars begin rolling in.

But these peasants, after looking a while, after pointing and gesticulating appreciatively a while, ambled over to the store across the street to stand and look some more. Craning his neck, Mr. Lin glared at the backs of the group of peasants, and sparks shot from his eyes. He wanted to go over and drag them back!

"Hic — hic —"

Behind the cashier's cage were swinging doors which separated the shop itself from the "inner sanctum." Beside these doors sat Mrs. Lin releasing hiccups that she had long been suppressing with difficulty. Miss Lin was seated beside her. Entranced, the girl watched the street silently, her heart pounding. At least half of her new dress had just walked away.

Mr. Lin strode quickly to the front of the counter. He glared jealously at the shop opposite. Its five salesmen were waiting expectantly behind the counter. But not one peasant entered the store. They looked for a while, then continued on their way. Mr. Lin relaxed; he couldn't help grinning at the salesmen across the street. Another group of seven or eight peasants stopped before Mr. Lin's shop. A youngster among them actually came a step forward. With his head cocked to one side, he examined the imported umbrellas. Mr. Lin whirled around, his face breaking into a happy smile. He went to work personally on this prospective customer.

"Would you like a foreign umbrella, Brother? They're cheap. You only pay ninety cents on the dollar. Come and take a look."

A salesman had already taken down two or three imported umbrellas. He promptly opened one and shoved it earnestly into the young peasant's hand. Summoning all his zeal, the salesman launched into a high powered patter.

"Just look at this, young master! Foreign satin cloth, solid ribs. It's durable and handsome for rainy days or clear. Ninety cents each. They don't come any cheaper. . . . Across the street, they're a dollar apiece, but they're not as good as these. You can compare them and see why."

The young peasant held the umbrella and stood undecided, with his mouth open. He turned toward a man in his fifties and weighed the umbrella in his hand as if to ask "Shall I buy it?" The older man became very upset and began to shout at him.

"You're crazy! Buying an umbrella! We only got three dollars for the whole boatload of firewood, and your mother's waiting at home for us to bring back some rice. How can you spend money on an umbrella!"

"It's cheap, but we can't afford it!" sighed the peasants standing around watching. They walked slowly away. The young peasant, his face brick red, shook his head. He put down the umbrella and started to leave. Mr. Lin was frantic. He quickly gave ground.

"How much do you say, Brother? Take another look. It's fine merchandise!"

"It is cheap. But we don't have enough money," the older peasant replied, pulling his son. They practically ran away.

Bitterly, Mr. Lin returned to the cashier's cage, feeling weak all over. He knew it wasn't that he was an inept businessman. The peasants simply were too poor. They couldn't even spend ninety cents on an umbrella. He stole a glance at the shop across the way. There too people were looking, but no one was going in. In front of the neighboring grocery store and the cookie shop, no one was even looking. Group after group of the country folk walked by carrying baskets. But the baskets all were empty. Occasionally, someone appeared with a homespun flowered blue cloth sack, filled with rice, from the look of it. The late rice which the peasants had harvested more than a month before had long since been squeezed out as rent for the landlords and interest for the usurers. Now in order to have rice to eat, the peasants were forced to buy a measure or two at a time, at steep prices.

All this Mr. Lin knew. He felt that at least part of his business was being indirectly eaten away by the usurers and landlords.

The hour gradually neared noon. There were very few peasants on the street now. Mr. Lin's shop had done a little over one dollar's worth of business, just enough to cover the cost of the "Big Sale 10% Discount" strips of red and green paper. Despondently, Mr. Lin entered the "inner sanctum." He barely had the courage to face his wife and daughter. Miss Lin's eyes were filled with tears. She sat in the corner with her head down. Mrs. Lin was in the middle of a string of hiccups. Struggling for control, she addressed her husband.

"We laid out four hundred dollars—and spent all night getting things ready in the shop—hic! We got permission to sell the Japanese goods, but business is dead—hic—my blessed ancestors! . . . The maid wants her wages—"

"It's only half a day. Don't worry." Mr. Lin forced a comforting note into his voice, but he felt worse than if a knife were cutting through his heart. Gloomily, he paced back and forth. He thought of all the business promotion tricks he knew, but none of them seemed any good. Business was bad. It had been bad in all lines for some time; his shop wasn't the only one having difficulty. People were poor, and there wasn't anything that could be done about it. Still, he hoped business would be better in the afternoon. The local townspeople usually did their buying

then. Surely they would buy things for New Year! If only they wanted to buy, Mr. Lin's shop was certain of trade. After all, his merchandise was cheaper than other shops!

It was this hope that enabled Mr. Lin to bolster his sagging spirits as he sat in the cashier's cage awaiting the customers he pictured coming in the afternoon.

And the afternoon proved to be different indeed from the morning. There weren't many people on the street, but Mr. Lin knew nearly every one of them. He knew their names, or the names of their fathers or grandfathers. These were local townspeople, and as they chatted and walked slowly past his shop, Mr. Lin's eyes, glowing with cordiality, welcomed them, and sent them on their way. At times, with a broad smile he greeted an old customer.

"Ah, Brother, going out to drink some tea? Our little shop has slashed its prices. Favor us with a small purchase!"

Sometimes, the man would actually stop and come into the shop. Then Mr. Lin and his assistants would plunge into a frenzy of activity. With acute sensitiveness, they would watch the eyes of the unpredictable customer. The moment his eyes rested on a piece of merchandise, the salesmen would swiftly produce one just like it and invite the customer to examine it. Miss Lin watched from beside the swinging doors, and her father frequently called her out to respectfully greet the unpredictable customer as "Uncle." An apprentice would serve him a glass of tea and offer him a good cigarette.

On the question of price, Mr. Lin was exceptionally flexible. When a customer was firm about knocking off a few odd cents from the round figure of his purchase price, Mr. Lin would take the abacus from the hands of his salesman and calculate personally. Then, with the air of a man who has been driven to the wall, he would deduct the few odd cents from the total bill.

"We'll take a loss on this sale," he would say with a wry smile. "But you're an old customer. We have to please you. Come and buy some more things soon!"

The entire afternoon was spent in this manner. Including cash and credit, big purchases and small, the shop made a total of over ten sales. Mr. Lin was drenched with perspiration, and although he was worn out, he was very happy. He had been sneaking looks at the shop across the street. They didn't seem to be nearly so busy. There was a pleased expression on the face of Miss Lin, who had been constantly watching from beside the swinging doors. Mrs. Lin even jerked out a few less hiccups.

Shortly before dark, Mr. Lin finished adding up his accounts for the day. The morning amounted to zero; in the afternoon they had sold sixteen dollars and eighty-five cents worth of merchandise, eight dollars of it being on credit. Mr. Lin smiled slightly, then he frowned. He had been selling all his goods at their original cost. He hadn't even covered his expenses for the day, to say nothing of making any profit. His mind

was blank for a moment. Then he took out his account books and calculated in them for a long time. On the "credit" side there was a total of over thirteen hundred dollars of uncollected debts — more than six hundred in town and over seven hundred in the countryside. But the "debit" ledger showed a figure of eight hundred dollars owed to the big Shanghai wholesale house alone. He owed a total of not less than two thousand dollars!

Mr. Lin sighed softly. If business continued to be so bad, it was going to be a little difficult for him to get through New Year. He looked at the red and green paper slips on the window announcing "Big Sale 10% Discount." If we really cut prices like we did today, business ought to pick up, he thought to himself. We're not making any profit, but if we don't do any business I still have to pay expenses anyway. The main thing is to get the customers to come in, then I can gradually raise my prices. . . . If we can do some wholesale business in the countryside, that will be even better! . . .

Suddenly, someone broke in on Mr. Lin's sweet dream. A shaky old lady entered the shop carrying a little bundle wrapped in blue cloth. Mr. Lin yanked up his head to find her confronting him. He wanted to escape, but there was no time. He could only go forward and greet her.

"Ah, Mrs. Chu, out buying things for the New Year? Please come into the back room and sit down. — Hsiu, give Mrs. Chu your arm."

But Miss Lin didn't hear. She had left the swinging doors some time ago. Mrs. Chu waved her hand in refusal and sat down on a chair in the store. Solemnly, she unwrapped the blue cloth and brought out a small account book. With two trembling hands she presented the book under Mr. Lin's nose. Twisting her withered lips, she was about to speak, but Mr. Lin had already taken the book and was hastening to say:

"I understand. I'll send it to your house tomorrow."

"Mm, mm, the tenth month, the eleventh month, the twelfth month; altogether three months. Three three's are nine; that's nine dollars, isn't it? — you'll send the money tomorrow? Mm, mm, you don't have to send it. I'll take it back with me! Eh!"

The words seemed to come with difficulty from Mrs. Chu's withered mouth. She had three hundred dollars loaned to Mr. Lin's shop, and was entitled to three dollars interest every month. Mr. Lin had delayed payment for three months, promising to pay in full at the end of the year. Now, she needed some money to buy gifts for tomorrow's Kitchen God Festival, and so she had come seeking Mr. Lin. From the forcefulness with which she moved her puckered mouth, Mr. Lin could tell that she was determined not to leave without the money.

Mr. Lin scratched his head in silence. He hadn't been deliberately refusing to pay the interest. It was just that for the past three months business had been poor. Their daily sales had been barely enough to cover their food and taxes. He had delayed paying her unconsciously. But if

he didn't pay her today, the old lady might raise a row in the shop. That would be too shameful and would seriously influence the shop's future.

"All right, all right. Take it back with you!" Mr. Lin finally said in exasperation. His voice shook a little. He rushed to the cashier's cage and gathered together all the cash that had been taken in that morning and afternoon. To that he added twenty cents from his own pocket, and presented the whole collection of dollars, pennies and dimes to the old lady. She carefully counted the lot over and over again, then with trembling hands wrapped the money in the blue cloth. Mr. Lin couldn't repress a sigh. He had a wild desire to snatch back a part of the cash.

"That blue handkerchief is too worn, Mrs. Chu," he said with a forced laugh. "Why not buy a good white linen one? We've also got top quality wash-cloths and soap. Take some to use over the New Year. Prices are reasonable!"

"No. I don't want any. An old lady like me doesn't need that kind of thing." She waved her hand in refusal. She put her account book in a pocket and departed, firmly grasping the blue cloth bundle.

Looking sour, Mr. Lin walked into the "inner sanctum." Mrs. Chu's visit reminded him that he had two other creditors. Old Chen and Widow Chang had put up two hundred and one hundred and fifty dollars respectively. He would have to pay them a total of ten dollars interest. He couldn't very well delay their money; in fact, he would have to pay them ahead of time. He counted on his fingers — twenty-fourth, twenty-fifth, twenty-sixth. — By the twenty-sixth, he ought to be able to collect all the outstanding debts in the countryside. His clerk Shousheng had gone off on a collection trip the day before yesterday. He should be back by the twenty-sixth at the latest. The unpaid bills in town couldn't be collected till the twenty-eighth or twenty-ninth. But the collector from the Shanghai wholesale house to which Mr. Lin owed money would probably come tomorrow or the day after. Lin's only alternative was to borrow more from the local bank. And how would business be tomorrow? . . .

His head down, Mr. Lin paced back and forth, thinking. The voice of his daughter spoke into his ear.

"Papa, what do you think of this piece of silk? Four dollars and twenty cents for seven feet. That's not expensive, is it?"

Mr. Lin's heart gave a leap. He stood stock-still and glared, speechless. Miss Lin held the piece of silk in her hand and giggled. Four dollars and twenty cents! It wasn't a big sum, but the shop only did sixteen dollars worth of business all day, and really at cost price! Mr. Lin stood frozen, then asked weakly:

"Where did you get the money?"

"I put it on the books."

Another debit. Mr. Lin scowled. But he had spoiled his daughter himself, and Mrs. Lin would take the girl's side no matter what the case might be. He smiled a helpless bitter smile. Then he sighed.

"You're always in such a rush," he said, slightly reproving. "Why couldn't you wait till after New Year!"

III

Another two days went by. Business was indeed very brisk in Mr. Lin's shop, with its "Big Sale." They did over thirty dollars in sales every day. The hiccups of Mrs. Lin diminished considerably; she hiccuped on the average of only once every five minutes. Miss Lin skipped up and back between the shop and the "inner sanctum," her face flushed and smiling. At times she even helped with the selling. Only after her mother called her repeatedly, did she return to the back room. Mopping her brow, she protested excitedly.

"Ma, why have you called me back again? It's not hard work! Ma, Papa's so tired he's soaking wet; his voice is gone!—A customer just made a five-dollar purchase! Ma, you don't have to be afraid it's too tiring for me! Don't worry! Papa told me to rest a while, then come out again!"

Mrs. Lin only nodded her head and hiccuped, followed by a murmur that "Buddha is merciful and kind." A porcelain image of the Goddess Kuanyin was enshrined in the "inner sanctum," with a stick of incense burning before it. Mrs. Lin swayed over to the shrine and kowtowed. She thanked the Goddess for Her Protection and prayed for Her Blessing on a number of matters—that Mr. Lin's business should always be good, that Miss Lin should grow nicely, that next year the girl should get a good husband.

But out in the shop, although Mr. Lin was devoting his whole being to business, though a smile never left his face, he felt as if his heart were bound with strings. Watching the satisfied customer going out with a package under his arm, Mr. Lin suffered a pang with every dollar he took in, as the abacus in his mind clicked a five percent loss off the cost price he had raised through sweat and blood. Several times he tried to estimate the loss as being three percent, but no matter how he figured it, he still was losing five cents on the dollar. Although business was good, the more he sold the worse he felt. As he waited on the customers, the conflict raging within his breast at times made him nearly faint. When he stole glances at the shop across the street, he had the impression that the owner and salesmen were sneering at him from behind their counters. Look at that fool Lin! they seemed to be saying. He really is selling below cost! Wait and see! The more business he does, the more he loses! The sooner he'll have to close down!

Mr. Lin gnawed his lips. He vowed he would raise his prices the next day. He would charge first-grade prices for second-rate merchandise.

The head of the Merchants Guild came by. It was he who had interceded with the Kuomintang chieftains for Mr. Lin on the question of

selling Japanese goods. Now he smiled and congratulated Mr. Lin, and clapped him on the shoulder.

"How goes it? That four hundred dollars was well spent!" he said softly. "But you'd better give a small token to Kuomintang Party Commissioner Pu too. Otherwise, he may become annoyed and try to squeeze you. When business is good, plenty of people are jealous. Even if Commissioner Pu doesn't have any 'ideas,' they'll try to stir him up!"

Mr. Lin thanked the head of the Merchants Guild for his concern. Inwardly, he was very alarmed. He almost lost his zest for doing business.

TH COMPLIMENTS OF
THE EMBASSY OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC
OF CHINA INDIA

ND HOUSE, LYTTON ROAD, NEW DELHI.

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"rapa, they're fighting in Shanghai! The Japanese bombed the Chapei section!" cried Miss Lin, running up to him.

Mr. Lin stopped short. What was all this about fighting in Shang-

hai? His first reaction was that it had nothing to do with him. But since it involved the "Japanese," he thought he had better inquire a little further. Looking at his daughter's agitated face, he asked:

"The Japanese bombed it? Who told you that?"

"Everyone on the street is talking about it. The Japanese soldiers fired heavy artillery and they bombed. Chapei is burned to the ground!"

"Oh, well, did anyone say that the boat from Lishih was robbed?"

Miss Lin shook her head, then fluttered from the room like a moth. Mr. Lin hesitated beside the swinging doors, scratching his head. Mrs. Lin was hiccuping and mumbling prayers.

"Buddha protect us! Don't let any bombs fall on our heads!"

Mr. Lin turned and went out to the shop. He saw his daughter engaged in excited conversation with the two salesmen. The owner of the shop across the street had come out from behind his counter and was talking, gesticulating wildly. There was fighting in Shanghai; Japanese planes had bombed Chapei and burned it; the merchants in Shanghai had closed down—it all was true. What about the pirates robbing the boat? No one had heard anything about that! And the boat from Lishih? It had come in safely. The shop owner across the street had just seen stevedores from the boat going by with two big crates. Mr. Lin was relieved. Shousheng hadn't come back today, but he hadn't been robbed by pirates either!

Now the whole town was talking about the catastrophe in Shanghai. Young clerks were cursing the Japanese aggressors. People were even shouting, "Anyone who buys Japanese goods is a son of a bitch!" These words brought a scarlet blush to Miss Lin's cheeks, but Mr. Lin showed no change of expression. All the shops were selling Japanese merchandise. Moreover, after spending a few hundred dollars, the merchants had received special authorizations from the Kuomintang chieftains, saying, "The goods may be sold after removing the Japanese markings." All the merchandise in Mr. Lin's shop had been transformed into "native goods." His customers, too, would call them "native goods," then take up their packages and leave.

Because of the war in Shanghai, the whole town had lost all interest in business, but Mr. Lin was busy pondering his affairs. Unwilling to borrow from the local bank at exorbitant interest, he sought out the collector from the Shanghai wholesale house, to plead with him as a friend for a delay of another day or two. Shousheng would be back tomorrow before dark at the latest, said Mr. Lin. Then he would pay in full.

"My dear Mr. Lin, you're an intelligent man. How can you talk like that? They're fighting in Shanghai. Train service may be cut off tomorrow or the day after. I only wish I could start back tonight! How can I wait a day or two? Please, settle your account today so that I can leave the first thing tomorrow morning. I'm not my own boss. Please have some consideration for me!"

The Shanghai collector was uncompromisingly firm in his refusal. Mr. Lin saw that it was hopeless; he had no choice but to bear the pain and seek a loan from the local banker. He was worried that "Old Miser" knew of his sore need and would take advantage of the situation to boost the interest rate. From the minute he started speaking to the bank manager, Mr. Lin could feel that the atmosphere was all wrong. The tubercular old man said nothing when Mr. Lin finished his plea, but continued puffing on his antique water-pipe. After the whole packet of tobacco was consumed, the manager finally spoke.

"I can't do it," he said slowly. "The Japanese have begun fighting, business in Shanghai is at a standstill, the banks have all closed down—who knows when things will be set right again! Cut off from Shanghai, my bank is like a crab without legs. With exchange of remittances stopped, I couldn't do business even with a better client than you. I'm sorry. I'd love to help you but my hands are tied!"

Mr. Lin lingered. He thought the tubercular manager was putting on an act in preparation for demanding higher interest. Just as Mr. Lin was about to play along by renewing his pleas, he was surprised to hear the manager press him a step farther.

"Our employer has given us instructions. He has heard that this confusion will probably get worse. He wants us to tighten up. Your shop originally owed us five hundred; on the twenty-second, you borrowed another hundred—altogether six hundred, due to be settled before New Year. We've been doing business together a long time, so I'm tipping you off. We want to avoid a lot of talk and embarrassment at the last minute."

"Oh—but our little shop is having a hard time," blurted the dumbfounded Mr. Lin. "I'll have to see how we do with our collections."

"Ho! Why be so modest! The last few days your business hasn't been like the others! What's so difficult about paying a mere six hundred dollars? I'm letting you know today, old brother. I'm looking forward to your settling your debt so that I can clear myself with my employer."

The tubercular manager spoke coldly. He stood up. Chilled, Mr. Lin could see that the situation was beyond repair. All he could do was to take a grip on himself and walk out of the bank. At last he understood that the fighting in distant Shanghai would influence his little shop too. It certainly was going to be hard to get through this New Year: The Shanghai collector was pressing him for money; the bank wouldn't wait until after the New Year; Shousheng still hadn't come back and there was no telling how he was getting on. So far as Mr. Lin's outstanding accounts in town were concerned, last year he had only collected eighty percent. From the looks of things, this year there was no guarantee of even that much. Only one road seemed open to Mr. Lin: "Business Temporarily Closed—Balancing Books"! And this was equivalent to bankruptcy. There hadn't been any of his own money invested in

the shop for a long time. The day the books were balanced and the creditors paid off, what would be left for him probably wouldn't be enough to stand between his family and nakedness!

The more he thought, the worse Mr. Lin felt. Crossing the bridge, he looked at the turgid water below. He was almost tempted to jump and end it all. Then a man hailed him from behind.

"Mr. Lin, is it true there's a war on in Shanghai? I hear that a bunch of soldiers just set up outside the town's east gate and asked the Merchants Guild for a 'loan.' They wanted twenty thousand right off the bat. The Merchants Guild is holding a meeting about it now!"

Mr. Lin hurriedly turned around. The speaker was Old Chen who had two hundred dollars loaned to the shop — another of Mr. Lin's creditors.

"Oh —" retorted Mr. Lin with a shiver. Quickly he crossed the bridge and ran home.

IV

For dinner that evening, beside the usual one meat dish and two vegetable dishes, Mrs. Lin had bought a favorite of Mr. Lin's — a platter of stewed pork. In addition, there was a pint of yellow wine. A smile never left Miss Lin's face, for business in the shop was good, her new silk dress was finished, and because they were fighting back against the Japanese in Shanghai. Mrs. Lin's hiccups were especially sparse — about one every ten minutes.

Only Mr. Lin was sunk in gloom. Moodily drinking his wine, he looked at his daughter, and looked at his wife. Several times he considered dropping the bad news in their midst like a bombshell, but he didn't have that kind of courage. Moreover, he still hadn't given up hope, he still wanted to struggle; at least he wanted to conceal his failure to make ends meet.

And so when the Merchants Guild passed a resolution to pay the soldiers five thousand dollars and asked Mr. Lin to contribute twenty, he consented without a moment's hesitation. He decided not to tell his wife and daughter the true state of affairs until the last possible minute. The way he calculated it was this: He would collect eighty percent of the debts due him, he would pay eighty percent of the money he owed. Anyhow, he had the excuse that there was fighting in Shanghai, that remittances couldn't be sent. The difficulty was that there was a difference of about six hundred dollars between what people owed him and what he had to pay to others. He would have to take drastic measures and cut prices heavily. The idea was to scrape together some money to meet the present problem, then he would see. Who could think of the future in times like these? If he could get by now, that would be enough.

That was how he made his plans. With the added potency of the

pint of yellow wine, Mr. Lin slept soundly all night, without even the suggestion of a bad dream.

It was already six thirty when Mr. Lin awoke the next morning. The sky was overcast and he was rather dizzy. He gulped down two bowls of rice gruel and hurried to the shop. The first thing to greet his eye was the Shanghai collector, sitting with a stern face, waiting for his "answer." But what shocked Mr. Lin particularly was the shop across the street. They too had pasted red and green strips all over their windows; they too were having a "Big Sale 10% Discount"! Mr. Lin's perfect plan of the night before was completely snowed under by those red and green streamers of his competitor.

"What kind of a joke is this, Mr. Lin? Last night you didn't give a reply. The boat leaves here at eight o'clock and I have to make connections with the train. I simply must catch that eight o'clock boat! Please hurry —" said the Shanghai collector impatiently. He brought his clenched fist down on the table.

Mr. Lin apologized and begged his forgiveness. Truly, it was all because of the fighting in Shanghai and not being able to send remittances. After all, they had been doing business for many years. Mr. Lin pleaded for a little special consideration.

"Then am I to go back empty-handed?"

"Why, why, certainly not. When Shousheng returns, I'll give you as much as he brings. I'm not a man if I keep so much as half a dollar!" Mr. Lin's voice trembled. With an effort he held back the tears that brimmed to his eyes.

There was no more to be said; the Shanghai collector stopped his grumbling. But he remained firmly seated where he was. Mr. Lin was nearly out of his wits with anxiety. His heart thumped erratically. Although he had been having a hard time the past few years, he had been able to keep up a front. Now there was a collector sitting in his shop for all the world to see. If word of this thing spread, Mr. Lin's credit would be ruined. He had plenty of creditors. Suppose they all decided to follow suit? His shop might just as well close down immediately. In desperation, several times he invited the Shanghai gentleman to wait in the back room where it was more comfortable, but the latter refused.

An icy rain began to fall. The street was cold and deserted. Never had it appeared so mournful at New Year's time. Signboards creaked and clattered in the grip of a north wind. The icy rain seemed like to turn into snow. In the shops that lined the street, salesmen leaning on the counters looked up blankly.

Occasionally, Mr. Lin and the collector from Shanghai exchanged a few desultory words. Miss Lin suddenly emerged through the swinging doors and stood at the front window watching the cold hissing rain. From the back room, the sound of Mrs. Lin's hiccups steadily gathered intensity. While trying to be pleasant to their visitor, Mr. Lin looked at his daughter and listened to his wife's hiccups, and a wave of depression

rose in his breast. He thought how all his life he had never known any prosperity, nor could he imagine who was responsible for his being reduced to such dire straits today.

The Shanghai collector seemed to have calmed down somewhat. "Mr. Lin," he said abruptly, in a sincere tone, "you're a good man. You don't go in for loose living, you're obliging and honest in your business practices. Twenty years ago, you would have gotten rich. But things are different today. Taxes are high, expenses are heavy, business is slow—it's an accomplishment just to get along."

Mr. Lin sighed and smiled in wry modesty.

After a pause, the Shanghai collector continued, "This year the market in this town was a little worse than last, wasn't it? Places in the interior like this depend on the people from the countryside for business, but the peasants are too poor. There's really no solution. . . . Oh, it's nine o'clock! Why hasn't your collection clerk come back yet? Is he reliable?"

Mr. Lin's heart gave a leap. For the moment, he couldn't answer. Although Shousheng had been his salesman for seven or eight years and had never made a slip, still, there was no absolute guarantee! And besides he was overdue. The Shanghai collector laughed to see Mr. Lin's doubtful expression, but his laugh had an odd ring to it.

At the window, Miss Lin whirled and cried urgently, "Papa, Shousheng is back! He's covered with mud!"

Her voice had a peculiar sound too. Mr. Lin jumped up, both alarmed and happy. He wanted to run out and look, but he was so excited that his legs were weak. By then Shousheng had already entered, truly covered with mud. The clerk sat down, panting for breath, unable to say a word. The situation looked bad. Frightened out of his wits, Mr. Lin was speechless too. The Shanghai collector frowned. After a while, Shousheng managed to gasp:

"Very dangerous! They nearly got me!"

"Then the boat was robbed?" the agitated Mr. Lin took a grip on himself and blurted.

"There wasn't any robbing. They were grabbing coolies for the army. I couldn't make the boat yesterday afternoon; I got a sampan this morning. After we sailed, we heard they were waiting at this end to grab the boat, so we came to port further down the river. When we got ashore, before we had come half a *li*, we bumped into an army press-gang. They grabbed the clerk from the clothing shop, but I ran fast and came back by a short cut. Damn it! It was a close call!"

Shousheng lifted his jacket as he talked and pulled from his money belt a cloth-bound packet which he handed to Mr. Lin.

"It's all here," he said. "That Hwang Shop in Lishih is rotten. We have to be careful of customers like that next year. . . . I'll come back after I have a wash and change my clothes."

Mr. Lin's face lit up as he squeezed the packet. He carried it over to the cashier's cage and unbound the cloth wrapping. First he added up the money due on the list of debtors, then he counted what had been collected. There were eleven silver dollars, two hundred dimes, four hundred and twenty dollars in banknotes, and two bank demand drafts — for the equivalent of fifty and sixty-five taels of silver respectively, at the official rate. If he turned the whole lot over to the Shanghai collector, it would still be more than a hundred dollars short of what he owed the wholesale house.

Deep in contemplation, Mr. Lin glanced several times out the corner of his eye at the Shanghai collector who was silently smoking a cigarette. At last he sighed, and as though cutting off a piece of his living flesh, placed the two bank drafts and four hundred dollars in cash before the man from Shanghai. Then Mr. Lin spoke for a long time until he managed to extract a nod from the latter and the words "all right."

But when the collector looked twice at the bank drafts, he said with a smile, "Sorry to trouble you, Mr. Lin. Please get them cashed for me first."

"Certainly, certainly," Mr. Lin hastened to reply. He quickly affixed his shop's seal to the back of the drafts and dispatched one of his salesmen to cash them at the local bank. In a little while, the salesman came back empty-handed. The bank had accepted the drafts but refused to pay for them, saying they would be credited against Mr. Lin's debt. Though it was snowing heavily now, Mr. Lin rushed over to the bank without an umbrella to plead in person. But his efforts were in vain.

"Well, what about it?" demanded the Shanghai collector impatiently as Mr. Lin returned to the shop, his face anguished.

Mr. Lin seemed ready to weep. There was nothing he could say; he could only sigh. Except to beg the collector for more leniency, what else could he do? Shousheng came out and added his pleas to Mr. Lin's. He vowed that they would send the remaining two hundred dollars to Shanghai by the tenth of the new year. Mr. Lin was an old customer who had always paid his debts promptly without a word, said Shousheng. This thing today was really unexpected. But that was the situation; they couldn't help themselves. It wasn't that they were stalling.

The Shanghai collector was adamant. Painfully, Mr. Lin brought out the fifty dollars he had taken in during the past few days and handed it over to make up a total payment of four hundred and fifty dollars. Only then did that headache of a Shanghai collector depart.

By that time, it was eleven in the morning. Snowflakes were still drifting down from the sky. Not even half a customer was in sight. Mr. Lin brooded a while, then discussed with Shousheng means to be used in collecting outstanding bills in town. Both men were frowning; neither of them had any particular confidence that much of the six hundred dollars due from town customers could be collected. Shousheng bent close to Mr. Lin's ear and whispered:

"I hear that the big shop at the south gate and the one at the west gate are both shaky. Both of them owe us money — about three hundred dollars altogether. We better take precautions with these two accounts. If they fold up before we can collect, it won't be so funny!"

Mr. Lin paled; his lips trembled a little. Then, Shousheng pitched his voice lower still, and mumbled a bit of even more shocking news.

"There's another nasty rumor — about us. They're sure to have heard it at the bank. That's why they're pressing us so hard. The Shanghai collector probably got wind of it too. Who can be trying to make trouble for us? The shop across the street?"

Shousheng pointed with his pursed lips in the direction of the suspect, and Mr. Lin's eyes swung to follow the indicator. His heart skipping unevenly, his face mournful, Mr. Lin was unable to speak for some time. He had the numb and aching feeling that this time he was definitely finished! If he weren't ruined it would be a miracle: The Kuomintang chieftains were putting the squeeze on him; the bank was pressing him; his fellow shopkeepers were stabbing him in the back; a couple of his biggest debtors were going to default. Nobody could stand up under this kind of buffeting. But why was he fated to get such a dirty deal? Ever since he inherited the little shop from his father, he had never dared to be wasteful. He had been so obliging; he never hurt a soul, never schemed against anyone. His father and grandfather had been the same, yet all he was reaping was bitterness!

"Never mind. Let them spread their rumors. You don't have to worry," Shousheng tried to comfort Mr. Lin, though he couldn't help sighing himself. "There are always rumors in lean years. They say in this town nine out of ten shops won't be able to pay up their debts before the year is out. Times are bad, the market is dead as a doornail. Usually strong shops are hard up this year. We're not the only one having rough going! When the sky tumbles everyone gets crushed. The Merchants Guild has to think of a way out. All the shops can't be collapsing; that would make the market even less like a market."

The snowfall was becoming heavier; it was sticking to the ground now. Occasionally, a dog would slink by, shivering, its tail between its legs. It might stop and shake itself violently to dislodge the snow thickly matting its fur. Then, with tail drooping again, the dog would go on its way. Never in its history had this street witnessed so frigid and desolate a New Year period! And just at this time, in distant Shanghai, Japanese heavy artillery was savagely pounding that prosperous metropolis of trade.

V

It was a gloomy New Year, but finally it was passed. In town, twenty-eight big and little shops folded up, including a "credit A-1" silk shop. The two stores that owed Mr. Lin three hundred dollars closed down too. The last day of the year, Shousheng had gone to them and

plagued them for hours, but all he could extract was a total of twenty dollars. He heard that afterwards no other collector got so much as a penny out of them; the owners of the two shops hid themselves and couldn't be found. Thanks to the intervention of the head of the Merchants Guild, it wasn't necessary for Mr. Lin to hide. But he had to guarantee to wipe off his debt of four hundred dollars to the bank before the fifteenth of the first month, and he had to consent to very harsh terms: The bank would send a representative to "guard" all cash taken in starting from resumption of business on the fifth; eighty percent of all money collected would go to the bank until Mr. Lin's debt to them was paid.

During the New Year holidays, Mr. Lin's house was like an ice box. Mr. Lin heaved sigh after sigh. Mrs. Lin's hiccups were like a string of firecrackers. Miss Lin, although she neither hiccuped nor sighed, moped around in the dazed condition of one who has suffered from years of jaundice. Her new silk dress had already gone to the only pawn shop in town to raise money for the maid's wages. An apprentice had taken it there at seven in the morning; it was after nine when he finally squeezed his way out of the crowd with two dollars in his hand. Afterwards, the pawn shop refused to do any more business that day. Two dollars! That was the highest price they would give for any article, no matter how much you had paid for it originally! This was called "two dollar ceiling." When a peasant, steeling himself against the cold, would peel off a cotton-padded jacket and hand it across the counter, the pawn shop clerk would raise it up, give it a shake, then fling it back with an angry "We don't want it!"

Since New Year's Day, the weather had been beautiful and clear. The big temple courtyard, as was the custom, was crowded with the stalls of itinerant pedlars and the paraphernalia of acrobats and jugglers. People lingered before the stalls, patted their empty money belts, and reluctantly walked on. Children dragged at their mothers' clothing, refusing to leave the stall where fireworks were on sale, until Mama was forced to give the little offender a hard slap. The pedlars, who had come specially to cash in on the usual New Year's bazaar trade, didn't even make enough to pay for their food. They couldn't pay their rent at the local inn and quarreled with the innkeeper every day.

Only the acrobatic troupe earned the large sum of eight dollars. It had been hired by the Kuomintang chieftains to add to the atmosphere of "peace and normalcy."

On the evening of the fourth, Mr. Lin, who had with some difficulty managed to raise three dollars, gave the usual spread for his employees at which they all discussed the strategy for the morrow's re-opening of business. The prospects were already terribly clear to Mr. Lin: If they re-opened, they were sure to operate at a loss; if they didn't re-open, he and his family would be entirely without resources. Moreover, people still owed him four hundred dollars, the collection of which would be even

more difficult, if he closed down. The only way out was to cut expenses. But taxes and levies for the soldiers were inescapable; there was even less chance of his avoiding being "squeezed." Fire a couple of salesmen? He only had three. Shousheng was his right-hand man; the other two were poor devils; besides he really needed them to wait on the customers. He couldn't save any more at home. They had already let the maid go. He felt the only thing to do was to plunge on. Perhaps, when the peasants, with Buddha's blessing, earned money from their spring raw silk sales, he still might make up his loss.

But the greatest problem in resuming business was that he was short of merchandise. Without money to remit to Shanghai, he couldn't replenish his stock. The fighting in Shanghai was getting worse. There was no use in hoping for getting anything on credit. Sell his reserve? The shop was long since actually cleaned out. The underwear boxes on the shelves were empty; they were used only for show. All that was left were things like wash-basins and towels. But he had plenty of those.

Gloomily, the feasters sipped their wine. For all their perplexed reflection, no one could offer any solution to the problem. They talked of generalities for a while. Then suddenly Ashi, one of the salesmen, said:

"The world is going to hell. People live worse than dogs! They say Chapei was completely burned out. A couple of hundred thousand people had to flee, leaving all their belongings behind. There wasn't any fire in the Hongkew section, but everybody ran away. The Japanese are very cruel. They wouldn't let them take any of their things with them. House rent in safe quarters in Shanghai has skyrocketed. All the refugees are running to the countryside. A bunch came to our town yesterday. They all look like decent people, and now they're homeless!"

Mr. Lin shook his head and sighed, but Shousheng, on hearing these words, was suddenly struck with a bright idea. He put down his chopsticks, then raised his wine cup and drained it in one swallow. He turned to Mr. Lin with a grin.

"Did you hear what Ashi just said? That means our wash-basins, wash-cloths, soap, socks, tooth powder, tooth brushes, will sell fast. We can get rid of as many as we've got."

Mr. Lin stared. He didn't know what Shousheng was driving at.

"Look, this is a heaven-sent chance. The Shanghai refugees should have a little money, and they need the usual daily necessities, don't they? We ought to set up right away to handle this business!"

Shousheng poured himself another cup of wine, and drank, his face beaming. The two salesmen caught on, and they began to laugh. Only Mr. Lin was not entirely clear. He had been rather dulled by his recent adversity.

"Are you sure?" he asked, irresolutely. "Other shops have wash-cloths and wash-basins too —"

"But we're the only ones with any real reserve of that sort of stuff. They don't have even ten wash-basins across the street, and those are all

seconds. We've got this piece of business right in the palm of our hand! Let's write a lot of ads and paste them up at the town's four gateways, any place in town where the refugees are staying — say, Ashi, where *are* they living? We'll go put up our stickers there!"

"The ones with relatives here are living with their relatives. The rest have borrowed that empty building in the silk factory outside the west gate." Ashi's face shone with satisfaction over the excellent result he had unwittingly produced.

At last, Mr. Lin had the whole picture. Happy, his spirits revived. He immediately drafted the wording of the advertisements, listing all the daily necessities which the shop had available for sale. There were over a dozen different commodities. In imitation of the big Shanghai stores, he adopted the "One Dollar Package" technique. For a dollar the customer would get a wash-basin, a wash-cloth, a tooth brush and a box of tooth powder. "Big Dollar Sale!" screamed the ad in huge letters. Shousheng brought out the shop's remaining sheets of red and green paper and cut them into large strips. Then he took up his brush and started writing. The salesmen and the apprentices noisily collected the wash-basins, wash-cloths, tooth brushes and boxes of tooth powder, and arranged them into sets. There weren't enough hands for all the work. Mr. Lin called his daughter out to help with writing the ads and tying the packages. He also made up other kinds of combination packages — all of daily necessities.

That night, they were busy in the shop late and long. At dawn they had things pretty much in order. When the popping of firecrackers heralded the opening of business the next morning, the shop of the Lin family again had a new look. Their advertisements had already been pasted up all over town. Shousheng had personally attended to the silk factory outside the west gate. The ad with which he plastered the factory walls struck the eyes of the refugees, and they all crowded around to read it as if it were a news bulletin.

In the "inner sanctum" Mr's. Lin, too, rose very early. She lit incense before the porcelain image of the Goddess Kuanyin and kowtowed for a considerable time, knocking her head resoundingly against the floor. She prayed for practically everything. About the only thing she omitted was a plea for more refugees to come to the town.

It all worked out fine, just as Shousheng had predicted. Mr. Lin's shop was the only one whose trade was brisk on the first business day after the New Year's holidays. By four in the afternoon, he had sold over one hundred dollars' worth of merchandise — the highest figure for a day ever reached in that town in the past ten years. His biggest seller was the "One Dollar Package," and it served as a leader to such items as umbrellas and rubber overshoes. Business, moreover, went smoothly, pleasantly. The refugees came from Shanghai, after all; they were used to the ways of the big city; they weren't as petty as the townspeople or the peasants from the outlying districts. When they bought something,

they made up their minds quickly. They'd pick up a thing, look at it, then produce their money. There was none of this pawing through all the merchandise, no haggling over a few pennies.

When her daughter, all flushed and excited, rushed into the back room for a moment to report the good business, Mrs. Lin went to kowtow before the porcelain Kuanyin again. If Shousheng weren't twice the girl's age, Mrs. Lin was thinking, wouldn't he make a good son-in-law! And it wasn't at all unlikely that Shousheng had half an eye on his employer's seventeen-year-old daughter, this girl whom he knew so well.

There was just one thing that spoiled Mr. Lin's happiness — completely disregarding his dignity, the local bank had sent its man to collect eighty percent of the sales proceeds. And he didn't know who 'egged them on, but the three creditors of the shop, on the excuse that they "needed a little money to buy rice," all showed up to draw out some advance interest. Not only interest; they even wanted repayment of part of their loans too! But Mr. Lin also heard some good news — another batch of refugees had arrived in town.

For dinner that evening, Mr. Lin served two additional meat dishes, by way of reward to his employees. Everyone complimented Shousheng on his shrewdness. Although Mr. Lin was happy, he couldn't help thinking of how his three creditors had talked about being repaid their loans. It was unlucky to have such a thing happen at the beginning of the new year.

"What do they know!" said Shousheng angrily. "Somebody must have put them up to it!" He pointed with his lips at the shop across the street.

Mr. Lin nodded. But whether the three creditors knew anything or not, it was going to be difficult to handle them. An old man and two widows. You couldn't be soft with them, but getting tough wouldn't do either. Mr. Lin pondered for some time, and finally decided the best thing to do would be to ask the head of the Merchants Guild to speak to his three precious creditors. He asked Shousheng for his opinion. Shousheng heartily agreed.

When dinner was over, and Mr. Lin had added up his receipts for the day, he went to pay his respects to the head of the Merchants Guild. The latter expressed complete approval of Mr. Lin's idea. What's more, he commended Mr. Lin on the intelligent way in which he conducted his business. He said the shop was sure to stand firm, in fact it would improve. Stroking his chin, the head of the Merchants Guild smiled and leaned toward Mr. Lin.

"There's something I've been wanting to talk to you about for a long time, but I never had the opportunity. I don't know where Kuomintang Commissioner Pu saw your daughter, but he's very interested in her. Commissioner Pu is forty and he has no sons. Though he has two women at home, neither of them has been able to give birth. If your daughter should join his household and present him with a child, he's sure to make

her his wife, Madam Commissioner. Ah, if that should happen, even I could share in the reflected glory!"

Never in his wildest dreams had Mr. Lin ever imagined he would run into trouble like this. He was speechless. The head of the Merchants Guild continued solemnly:

"We're old friends. There's nothing we can't speak freely about to each other. This kind of thing, according to the old standards, would make you lose face. But it isn't altogether like that any more; it's quite common nowadays. Your daughter's going over could be considered proper marriage. Anyhow, since that is what Commissioner Pu has in mind, there might be some inconvenience if you refuse him. If you agree, you can have real hope for the future. I wouldn't be telling you this if I didn't have your interests at heart."

"Of course in advising me to be careful, your intentions are the best! But I'm an unimportant person, my daughter knows nothing of high society. We don't dare aspire so high as a commissioner!" Mr. Lin had to brace himself up to speak. His heart was thumping fast.

"Ha ha! It isn't a question of your aspirations, but the fact that he finds her suitable. . . . Let's leave it at that. You go home and talk it over with your wife. I'll put the matter aside. When I see Commissioner Pu I'll say I haven't had a chance to speak to you about it, alright? But you must give me an answer soon!"

There was a long pause. Then, "I will," Mr. Lin forced himself to say. His face was ghastly.

When he got home, he sent his daughter out of the room and reported to his wife in detail. Even before he finished, Mrs. Lin's hiccups rose in a powerful barrage that was probably audible to all the neighbors. With an effort she stemmed the tide and said, panting:

"How can we consent? — hic — Even if it wasn't a concubine he wanted — hic — hic — even if he were looking for a wife, I still couldn't bear to part with her!"

"That's the way I feel, but —"

"Hic — we run our business all legal and proper. Do you mean to say if we don't agree he could get away with taking her by force? Hic —"

"But he's sure to find an excuse to make some kind of trouble. That kind of man is crueller than a bandit!" Mr. Lin whispered. He was nearly crying.

"He'll get her only over my dead body! Hic! Goddess Kuanyin preserve us!" cried Mrs. Lin in a voice that trembled. She rose and started to sway out of the room. Mr. Lin hastily barred her way.

"Where are you going? Where are you going?" he babbled.

Just then, Miss Lin came in. Obviously she had overheard quite a bit, for her complexion was the color of chalk and her eyes were staring fixedly. Mrs. Lin flung her arms around her daughter and wept and hiccuped while she struggled to say in gasps:

"Hic — child — hic — anybody who tries to snatch you — hic — will

have to do it over my dead body! Hic! The year I gave birth to you I got this — sickness — hic — It was hard, but I brought you up till now you're seventeen — hic — hic — Dead or alive, we'll stick together! Hic! We should have promised you to Shousheng long ago! Hic! That Pu is a dirty crook! He isn't afraid the gods will strike him down!"

Miss Lin wept too, crying "Ma!" Mr. Lin wrung his hands and sighed. The women were wailing at an alarming rate, and he was afraid their laments would be heard through the thin walls and startle the neighbors. This sort of row was also an unlucky way to commence the new year. Holding his own emotions in check, he did his best to soothe wife and daughter.

That night, all three members of the Lin family slept badly. Although Mr. Lin had to get up early the next morning to go to business, he wrestled with his gloomy thoughts all night. A sudden sound on the roof sent his heart leaping with fear that Commissioner Pu had come to trump up charges against him. Then he calmed himself and considered the matter carefully. His was a family of proper business people who had never committed any crimes. As long as he did a good business and didn't owe people money, surely Pu couldn't make trouble without any reason at all. And now Lin's business was beginning to show some vitality. Just because he had raised a good-looking daughter, he had invited disaster! He should have engaged her years ago, then maybe this problem would never have arisen. . . . Was the head of the Merchants Guild sincerely willing to help? The only way out was to beg for his aid — Mrs. Lin started hiccuping again. Ai! That ailment of hers!

Mr. Lin rose as soon as the sky began to turn light. His eyes were somewhat bloodshot and swollen, and he felt dizzy. But he had to pull himself together and attend to business. He couldn't leave the entire management of the shop to Shousheng; the young fellow had put in an exhausting few days.

He was still uneasy after he seated himself in the cashier's cage. Although business was good, from time to time his whole body was shaken by violent shivers. Whenever a big man came in, if Mr. Lin didn't know him, he would suspect that the man had been sent by Commissioner Pu to spy, to stir up a fuss, and his heart would thump painfully.

And it was strange. Business that day was active beyond all expectations. By noon they had sold nearly sixty dollars' worth of merchandise. There were local townspeople among the customers too. They weren't just buying; they were practically grabbing. The only thing like it would be a bankrupt shop selling its stock out at auction, cheap. While Mr. Lin was fairly pleased, he was also rather alarmed. This kind of business didn't look healthy to him. Sure enough, Shousheng approached him during the lunch hour and said softly:

"There's a rumor outside that you've cut prices to clear out your leftovers. That when you've collected a little money, you're going to take it and run!"

Mr. Lin was both angry and frightened. He couldn't speak. Suddenly two men in uniform entered and barged forward to demand:

"Which one is Mr. Lin, the proprietor?"

Mr. Lin rose in flurried haste. Before he had a chance to reply, the uniformed men began to lead him away. Shousheng came over to stop them and to question them. They barked at him savagely:

"Who are you? Stand aside! He's wanted for questioning at the Kuomintang office!"

VI

That afternoon, Mr. Lin did not return. They were busy at the shop, and Shousheng could not get away to inquire personally. He had managed to conceal the truth from Mrs. Lin, but one of the apprentices let it leak out, and the lady became frantic almost to the point of distraction. She absolutely refused to let Miss Lin go out of the swinging doors.

"They've already taken your father. They'll be coming back for you next! Hic —"

She called in Shousheng and questioned him closely. He didn't think it advisable to tell her too much.

"Don't worry, Mrs. Lin," he comforted. "There's nothing wrong! He only went down to the Kuomintang office to straighten out the question of our creditors. Business is good. What have we got to be afraid of!"

Behind Mrs. Lin's back, he told Miss Lin quietly, "We still don't really know what this is all about." He urged her to look after her mother; he would attend to the shop. Miss Lin didn't have the faintest idea what to do. She agreed to everything Shousheng said.

Between waiting on the customers and thinking up answers to Mrs. Lin's constant questions, it was impossible for Shousheng to find time to inquire about the fate of Mr. Lin. Finally, at twilight, word was brought by the head of the Merchants Guild: Mr. Lin was being held by the Kuomintang chieftains because of the rumor that he was planning to abscond with the shop's money. Besides what Mr. Lin owed the bank and the wholesale house, there were also his three poor creditors to be considered. The total of six hundred and fifty dollars which they had put up was in jeopardy. The Kuomintang was especially concerned over the welfare of these poor people. So it was detaining him until he settled with them.

Shousheng's face was drained of color. Dazed, he finally managed to ask:

"Can we put up a guarantee and have him released first? Unless we get him out, how are we going to raise the money?"

"Huh! Release him on a guarantee! You can't become his guarantor if you go there without money in your hands!"

"Mr. Guild Leader, think of something, I beg you. Do a good deed. You and Mr. Lin are old friends. I beg you to help him!"

The head of the Merchants Guild frowned thoughtfully. He looked at Shousheng for a minute, then led him to a corner of the room and said in a low voice:

"I can't stand by with folded arms and watch Mr. Lin remain in difficulty. But the situation is very strained now! To tell you the truth, I've already pleaded with Commissioner Pu to intervene. Commissioner Pu only wanted Mr. Lin to agree to one thing, and would be willing to help him. I've just seen Mr. Lin at the Kuomintang office where I urged him to consent, and he did so. Shouldn't that be the end of the matter? Who would have thought that dark pock-marked fellow in the Kuomintang would be so nasty? He still insists —"

"Surely he wouldn't go against Commissioner Pu?"

"That's what I thought! But the pock-marked fellow kept mumbling and grumbling till Commissioner Pu was very embarrassed. They had a terrible row! Now you see how awkward things are?"

Shousheng sighed. He had no ideas. There was a pause, then he sighed again and said:

"But Mr. Lin hasn't committed any crime."

"Those people don't talk reason! With them, might makes right! Tell Mrs. Lin not to worry; Mr. Lin hasn't been mistreated yet. But to get him out she'll have to spend a little money!"

The head of the Merchants Guild held up two fingers, then quickly departed.

Though he racked his brains, Shousheng could see no other alternative. The two salesmen plagued him with questions, but he ignored them. He was wondering whether he should report the words of the head of the Merchants Guild to Mrs. Lin. Again they had to spend money! While he didn't know whether Mrs. Lin had any private resources of her own, he was quite clear as to the financial condition of the shop: After the local bank got through deducting its eighty percent from the cash earned during the past two days, all that was left for the shop was about fifty dollars. A lot of good that would do! The head of the Merchants Guild had indicated a bribe of two hundred dollars. Who knew whether that would be enough! The way things were, even if business should improve even more, it still wouldn't be any use. Shousheng felt discouraged.

From the back room, someone was calling him. He decided to go in and size up the situation, and then determined what should be done. He found Mrs. Lin leaning on her daughter's arm.

"Hic — just now — hic — the head of the Merchants Guild came — hic —" she panted. "What did he say?"

"He wasn't here," lied Shousheng.

"You can't fool me — hic — I — hic — know everything. Hic — your face is scared yellow! Hsiu saw him — hic!"

"Be calm, Mrs. Lin. He says it's all right. Commissioner Pu is willing to help —"

"What? Hic — hic — What? Commissioner Pu is willing to help! — hic, hic — Merciful goddess — hic — I don't want his help! Hic, hic — I know — Mr. Lin — hic, hic — is finished! Hic — I want to die too! There's only Hsiu — hic — that I'm worried about! Hic, hic — take her with you! — hic! You two go and get married! Hic — hic — Shousheng — hic — you take good care of Hsiu and I won't worry about anything! Hic! Go! They want to grab her! — hic — the savage beasts! Goddess Kuanyin, why don't you display your divine power!"

Shousheng stared. He didn't know what to say. He thought Mrs. Lin had gone mad, yet she didn't look the least abnormal. His heart beating hard, he stole a glance at Miss Lin. She was blushing scarlet; she kept her head down and made no comment.

"Shousheng, Shousheng, somebody wants to see you!" an apprentice came running in and announced.

Thinking it was the head of the Merchants Guild or some such personage, Shousheng rushed out. To his surprise, he found Mr. Wu, proprietor of the shop across the street, waiting for him. What does he want? wondered Shousheng. He fixed his eyes on Mr. Wu's face.

Mr. Wu inquired about Mr. Lin, and then, all smiles, said he was sure it was "not serious." Shousheng felt there was something fishy about his smile.

"I've come to buy a little of your merchandise —" The smile had disappeared from Mr. Wu's face and the tone of his voice changed. He produced a sheet of paper from his sleeve. It was a list of over a dozen items — the very things Mr. Lin was featuring in his "One Dollar Package." One look and Shousheng understood. So that was the game!

"Mr. Lin isn't here," he said promptly. "I haven't the right to decide."

"Why not talk to Mrs. Lin? That'll be just as good!"

Shousheng hesitated to reply. He was beginning to have an inkling of why Mr. Lin had been detained. First there was the rumor that Mr. Lin was planning to run away, then Mr. Lin was arrested, and now the competitor's shop had come to gouge merchandisc. There was an obvious connection between these events. Shousheng became rather angry, and a bit frightened. He knew that if he agreed to Mr. Wu's request, Mr. Lin's business would be finished, and the heart's blood that he himself had expended would be in vain. But if he refused, what other tricks would be forthcoming? He simply didn't dare to think.

"I'll go and talk to Mrs. Lin, then," he offered tentatively. "But she only operates on a cash basis."

"Cash? Ha, Shousheng, of course you're joking?"

"That's the kind of person Mrs. Lin is. I can't do anything with her. The best thing would be for you to come again tomorrow. The head of the Merchants Guild just told me that Commissioner Pu is willing

to take a hand in the matter. Mr. Lin probably will be back tonight," said Shousheng with cold deliberateness. He shoved the list back in Mr. Wu's hand.

His face twitching, the latter hastily forced the list on Shousheng again.

"All right, all right, if it has to be cash then it's cash. I'll take the goods tonight. Cash on delivery."

Scowling, Shousheng walked into the back room and told Mrs. Lin about the shop across the street wanting to gouge merchandise.

"When the head of the Merchants Guild was here, he really said Mr. Lin was fine; he hasn't been through any hardships. But we'll have to spend some money to get him out. There's only fifty dollars in the shop. Now this fellow across the street wants goods — from the looks of his list, about a hundred and fifty dollars' worth. Why not let him have them? The important thing is to get Mr. Lin back as soon as possible!"

Upon hearing that they had to spend money again, tears gushed from Mrs. Lin's eyes, and her hiccups truly shook the heavens with their intensity. Beyond words, she could only wave her hand, while her head, which she rested on the table, resounded alarmingly against the wooden top. Shousheng could see that he was getting nowhere, and he quietly withdrew. Miss Lin caught up with him outside the swinging doors. Her face was deathly white, her voice trembling and hoarse.

"Ma is so angry she can't think straight," Miss Lin whispered urgently. "She keeps saying they've already killed Papa! You, you hurry up and agree to what Mr. Wu wants. Save Papa, quick! Shousheng, Brother, you —" At this point, her face suddenly flamed scarlet, and she flew back into the room.

In a daze, Shousheng stared after her for a full half minute, then he turned away, determined to take the responsibility for selling the merchandise to their competitor. At least Miss Lin agreed with him on what should be done.

The table had already been laid for dinner in the shop, but Shousheng had no appetite. As soon as Mr. Wu arrived with the money, Shousheng took one hundred dollars in his hand and concealed another eighty dollars on his person, and rushed off to find the head of the Merchants Guild.

Half an hour later Shousheng returned with Mr. Lin. Bursting into the "inner sanctum," they nearly startled Mrs. Lin out of her wits. When she saw that it was really Mr. Lin in the flesh, she agitatedly prostrated herself before the porcelain Kuanyin and kowtowed vigorously, pounding her head so loudly that it drowned out the sound of her hiccups. Miss Lin stood to one side, her eyes staring. She looked as if she wanted to laugh and cry at the same time. Shousheng took out a paper-wrapped packet and set it on the table.

"This is eighty dollars we didn't have to use."

Mr. Lin sighed. When he finally spoke, his voice was dull.

"You should have let me die there and be done with it. Spending

more money to get me out! Now we've got no money, we're all going to die anyhow!"

Mrs. Lin jumped up from the ground, excited and wanting to speak. But a string of hiccups blocked the words in her throat. Miss Lin wept quietly, with suppressed sobs. Mr. Lin did not cry. He sighed again and said in a choked voice:

"Our merchandise has been cleaned out! We can't do any business, they're pressing us hard for debts —"

"Mr. Lin!"

It was Shousheng who shouted. He dipped his finger in the tea, then wrote on the table the one word — "Go."

Mr. Lin shook his head. Tears flowed from his eyes. He looked at his wife, he looked at his daughter, and again he sighed.

"That's the only way out, Mr. Lin! We can still scrape together a hundred dollars in the shop. Take it with you; it'll be enough for a month or two. I'll take care of what has to be done here."

Although Shousheng spoke quietly, Mrs. Lin overheard him. She curbed her hiccups and interjected:

"You go too, Shousheng! You and Hsiu. Leave me here alone. I'll fight to the death! Hic!"

Mrs. Lin suddenly appeared remarkably young and healthy; she whirled and ran up the stairs. "Ma!" called Miss Lin, and dashed after her mother. Mr. Lin stared at the stairway, bewildered. He felt he had something important to say, but he was too numb to recall what it was.

"You and Hsiu go together," Shousheng urged softly. "Mrs. Lin will worry if Hsiu stays here! She says they want to snatch —"

Tears in his eyes, Mr. Lin nodded. He couldn't make up his mind.

Shousheng felt his own eyes smarting. He sighed and walked around the table.

Just then, they heard Miss Lin crying. Startled, Mr. Lin and Shousheng rushed up the stairs. Mrs. Lin was coming out of her room with a paper packet in her hand. She went back into the room when she saw them, and said:

"Please come in, both of you. Listen to what I've decided." She pointed at the packet. "In here is my private property — hic — about two hundred dollars. I'm giving you two half. Hic! Hsiu, I give you in marriage to Shousheng! Hic — tomorrow, Hsiu and her father will leave together. Hic — I'm not going! Shousheng will stay with me a few days, and then we'll see. Who knows how many days I have left to live — hic — So if you both kowtow in my presence, I can set my mind at ease! Hic —"

Mrs. Lin took her daughter by one hand and Shousheng by the other, and ordered them to "kowtow." Both did so, their cheeks flaming red; they kept their heads down. Shousheng stole a glance at Miss Lin. There was a faint smile on her tear-stained face. His heart thumped wildly, and two tears rolled down from his eyes.

"Good. That's the way it'll be." Mr. Lin heaved a sigh. "But Shousheng, when you stay here and deal with those people, be very, very careful!"

VII

The shop of the Lin family had to close down at last. The news that Mr. Lin had run away soon spread all over town. Of the creditors, the local bank was the first to send people to put the stock into custody. They also searched for the account books. Not one was to be found. They asked for Shousheng. He was sick in bed. They grilled Mrs. Lin. Her reply was a string of explosive hiccups and a stream of tears. Since she after all enjoyed the social position of "Madame Lin," there was nothing they could do with her.

By about eleven a.m., the horde of creditors in the Lin shop were quarreling with a tremendous din. The local bank and the other creditors were wrangling as to how to divide the remaining property. Although the stock was nearly gone, the remainder and the furniture and fixtures were enough to repay the creditors about seventy percent; but each was fighting for a ninety, or even one hundred, percent for himself. The head of the Merchants Guild had talked until his tongue was a little paralyzed, to no avail.

Two policemen arrived and took their stand outside the shop door. Clubs in hand, they barked at the crowd that had gathered to see the excitement.

"Why can't I go in? I've got a three hundred dollar loan in this shop! My savings!" Mrs. Chu argued with a policeman, twisting her withered lips. Tottering, she was elbowing her way through the mass. The blue veins on her forehead stood out as thick as little fingers. She kept pushing. Then suddenly she saw Widow Chang, with her five-year-old baby in her arms, pleading with the other policeman to let her enter. He looked at the widow out of the corners of his eyes, and while feigning to tease the child, furtively rubbed the back of his hand against the widow's breasts.

"Sister Chang —" Mrs. Chu gasped loudly. She sat down on the edge of the stone steps, forcibly moving her puckered mouth.

Widow Chang turned around to see who had called her.

"Don't be in such a hurry," leered the policeman. "Getting in will be soon enough!"

At this, the crowd of idlers laughed. Widow Chang pretended not to understand. Tears in her eyes, she took an aimless step, which brought into her line of vision Mrs. Chu panting on the edge of the stone stairs. She practically stumbled over to Mrs. Chu and sat down beside her. Then, Widow Chang began to cry and lament:

"Oh, my husband, you've left me alone! You don't know how I'm suffering! The wicked soldiers killed you — it was three years ago the

day before yesterday. . . . That cursed Mr. Lin — may he die without sons or grandsons! — has closed his shop! The hundred and fifty dollars that I earned by the toil of my two hands has fallen into the sea and is gone without a sound! Aiya! The lot of the poor is hard, and the rich have no hearts —”

Hearing his mother cry, the child also began to wail. Widow Chang hugged him to her bosom and wept even more bitterly.

Mrs. Chu did not cry. Her sunken red-rimmed eyes glared, and she kept saying frantically:

“The poor have only one life, and the rich have only one life. If they don’t give me back my money, I’ll fight them to the death!”

Just then, a man pushed his way out of the shop. It was Old Chen. His face was purple. He was cursing as he jostled through the crowd.

“You gang of crooks! You’ll pay for this! One day I’ll see you all burning in the fires of Hell! If we have to take a loss, everybody should take it together. Even if I got only a small share of what’s left, at least that would be fair —”

Still swearing vigorously, he spotted the two women.

“Mrs. Chang, Mrs. Chu, what are you sitting there crying for!” he shouted to them. “They’ve finished dividing up the property. My one mouth couldn’t out-argue their dozen. That pack of jackals doesn’t give a damn about what’s reasonable. They insist that our money doesn’t count —”

His words made Widow Chang weep more bitterly than ever. The playful policeman abruptly walked over to her. He poked her shoulder with his club.

“Hey, what are you crying about? Your man died a long time ago. Which one are you crying for now!”

“Dog farts!” roared Old Chen furiously. “While those people are stealing our money, all a turd like you can do is get gay with women!” He gave the policeman a strong push.

The policeman’s nasty eyes went wide. He raised his club to strike, but the crowd yelled and cursed at him. The other policeman ran over and pulled Old Chen to one side.

“It’s no use your raising a fuss. We’ve got nothing against you. The Merchants Guild has ordered us to guard the door. We’ve got to eat. We can’t help it.”

“Old Chen, go make a complaint at the Kuomintang office!” a man shouted from the crowd. From the sound of it, it was the voice of Lu, the well-known loafer.

“Go on, go on!” yelled several others. “See what they say to that!”

The policeman who had mediated laughed coldly. He grasped Old Chen by the shoulder. “I advise you not to go looking for trouble. Going there won’t do you any good! You wait till Mr. Lin comes back and settle things with him. He can’t deny the debt.”

Old Chen fumed. He couldn't make up his mind. The idlers were still shouting for him to "go." He looked at Mrs. Chu and Widow Chang.

"What do you say? They're always screaming down there how they protect the poor!"

"That's right," called one of the crowd. "Yesterday they arrested Mr. Lin because they said they didn't want him to run away with poor people's money!"

Almost involuntarily, Old Chen and the two women were swept along by the crowd down the street to the Kuomintang office. Widow Chang was crying as she walked, and cursing the wicked soldiers who had killed her husband, and praying that Mr. Lin should die without sons or grandsons, and reviling that dirty dog of a policeman!

As they neared the office, they saw four policemen standing outside the gate with clubs in their hands. The policemen yelled to them from a distance:

"Go home! You can't go in!"

"We've come to make a complaint!" shouted Old Chen, who was in the first rank of the crowd. "The shop of the Lin family has closed down, and we can't get hold of the money we put up —"

A swarthy pockmarked man jumped out from behind the policemen and howled for them to attack. But the policemen stood their ground, restricting themselves to threats. The crowd in back of Old Chen began to clamor.

"You cheap mongrels don't know what's good for you!" screamed the pockmarked man. "Do you think we have nothing better to do than bother about your business? If you don't get out of here, we're going to fire!"

He stamped and yelled at the policemen to use their clubs. In the front ranks, Old Chen was struck several times. The crowd milled in confusion. Mrs. Chu was old and weak, and she toppled to the ground. In her panicky haste, Widow Chang lost her slippers. Pushed and buffeted, she also fell down. Rolling and crawling, she avoided many leaping and stamping feet. She scrambled up and ran for all she was worth. It was then she realized that her child was gone. There were drops of blood on the upper part of her jacket.

"Aiya! My precious! My heart! The bandits are killing people! Jade Emperor God save us!"

Wailing, her hair tumbled in disorder, she ran quickly. By the time she fled past the closed door of the shop of the Lin family, she was completely out of her mind.

June 1932

Comrade Huang Wen-yuan

PA·CHIN

I

There was a drizzle in the evening when I arrived at the headquarters of the company Huang Wen-yuan was in. A Volunteer called Chiang had escorted me most of the way and left me half-way up the mountain. As I walked over the ridge, I was met by a youngster sent from company headquarters. He was a lad of twenty or twenty-one from Szechuan. There was a friendly smile on his round face, and he was wearing an oilskin. He took my case and led the way cheerfully.

The mountain was overgrown with bushes and the path was narrow and zigzag. I would not have been able to find my way to the company headquarters without him.

"Look, how well we've built in here," he said suddenly as he turned back to me. "We've made ourselves at home. Every one here is mighty happy. The only thing is that we miss seeing all that's happening at home."

"That's natural," said I. "It seems one feels closer to home when one is away."

"That's right," he rejoined. "It's good to hear about the rapid construction that is going on at home. We feel as though we have a part in that construction too. . . ."

By now we had reached the headquarters.

"Here we are," said he.

It was a bunker of sandstone. The entrance seemed pretty bright, but it was pitch dark inside. One felt a draught as one stood there at the entrance.

"Please take off your raincoat and come in," said he.

Only when the raincoat was off did I realise that I was already thoroughly soaked. My undergarments were wet with sweat and my outer ones with rain.

I thanked him, and asked his name.

"Huang Wen-yuan is my name," he replied with a smile. Then he remarked, "Here comes our deputy commander."

Out walked a slim young man of medium height with rather large eyes. His face was pale and there was a scar under his chin. He was dressed neatly and he extended his hand with a smile, saying, "You are welcome."

As I shook his hand, he told me that the company commander and the political instructor were both at a meeting. An orderly brought some low stools made by the men, and we had a chat just outside the bunker. Later the deputy commander asked Huang Wen-yuan to take me to my billet.

Again, Huang walked first, carrying my case, and I followed him. The road was a little slippery and he walked slowly enough for me to follow. We strode along a trench, then over a height, and again along another trench. At last we reached the place where I was to stay.

This was a smallish sandstone bunker. Only three steps down from the trench and we were in it. The bunker was by no means deep. About five steps from the entrance stood a *kang*, and the two wooden pillars in front of it made the place look like a shrine. There was a niche in the right stone wall where a little vegetable oil lamp was glimmering.

The *kang* seemed large enough to accommodate three people. It was already covered with straw and oilcloth.

"Have you brought your bedding with you?" Huang asked.

"Yes, I have. Don't worry about me," I replied as I took off my raincoat and hung it on a nail on one pillar.

"All right, I'll go and get you some boiled water, while you rest." So saying, he walked out.

I opened my suitcase and took out a woolen blanket which I spread over the *kang*. Then I took out some magazines and wrapped a towel round them to serve as a pillow. Having made my bed, I changed my wet vest and shirt. Then I seated myself on the *kang* and looked outside.

It was pitch dark and the rain was spattering. I heard someone talking nearby, and was glad to think that the men of this company must be billeted all around me. I was planning how to visit them the next day, when suddenly footsteps were heard.

"Here's your boiled water," announced Huang Wen-yuan's youthful voice. There was an army flask in his right hand and an enamel bowl in his left. He was still wearing the oilskin cape. He put the enamel bowl on the *kang*, uncorked the flask and poured a bowlful of steaming water for me.

"Please have a drink, and then you should have a rest," he urged. "I'm in the bunker next to you. Call me if you need anything. Good-night."

He saluted and strode out.

This was how I settled down here and began to get to know the men.

I told them that I was one of several writers who had come to live at the front and to learn from them. But they treated me as an old friend from home, and went out of their way to make things easy for me. My work was simple. I stayed with the three squads alternately, taking part in their study and other activities, or, to be more exact, watching how they lived and studied.

On clear days, the spotting planes usually came out early in the morning in ones or twos, and always circled over the hills in this district. They would fly round and round till dusk. Hence, there could not be many activities in the open. But the men had little rest, apart from their noon nap. There was a horizontal bar by the chestnut trees on the slope. On fine days some soldiers could always be seen doing exercises there in the semi-darkness. Just before the evening roll-call, there was often some singing.

During the first three days after my arrival, they let me eat alone in my bunker, the meals being brought in by Huang Wen-yuan.

On the fourth day, I was eating with the men of the Third Squad. There was no change on the part of the men towards me, but I myself felt differently. When I squatted with my bowl at the entrance of the bunker, or sat on a stool or on the *kang* inside, eating and listening to and taking part in their conversation, I felt the distance between us immeasurably shortened. Sometimes I felt I was one of them, I was so perfectly at home with them.

There were eleven men in the squad, the majority of whom came from North China. Some came from Kwangtung. Huang Wen-yuan was the only one from Szechuan.* He would be twenty-one in a month's time and was one of the youngest in the squad. Next came Chen Ta-jen, a thin, dark-faced Cantonese. He was senior to Huang by one year. Chen was fond of dancing and singing while Huang enjoyed talking more; Chen was always smiling and seldom showed any sign of worry.

But on Sunday afternoons when his comrades received dried eggs, vegetables and tinned meat from the kitchen and started making dumplings, Huang Wen-yuan would frown. Szechuanese, he said, considered dumplings a snack, not a meal. You couldn't fill yourself on them. On such occasions, he always ate less than the others. So when he found that I was eating even less than he, he commented with some complacency, "Didn't I say so! No Szechuanese takes dumplings for a meal."

"Right here, there are no Szechuanese or Cantonese, northerners or southerners. We are all Chinese," corrected Chen Ta-jen with his Cantonese accent.

* Pa Chin, the author, also came from Szechuan.

"Right!" agreed all the others in unison.

"I agree you're right," said Huang with a nod. "Only I can never forget Szechuan. My one dream is to enjoy a ride on the newly-built Chengtu-Chungking Railway."

"That's not all," said Chen Ta-jen jokingly. "What you find even more difficult to forget are Chikiang County, your own village and the brook behind your house. I've heard you say so many times."

Huang stopped smiling. He put down his bowl, and cupped his chin with his hands in silence, apparently lost in thought. An older man sitting next to him said with a smile, "Look, he's thinking of his home again."

Huang let his hands fall to his sides and stood up, blinking. He said smilingly and with emotion, "Do I need to *think* of my home? I even remember how large the oak tree in front of our house is. I've only been away just over a year. I haven't forgotten a thing."

"Have you been dreaming again of seeing Chairman Mao?" asked Chen Ta-jen.

"Yes, Huang Wen-yuan, tell Comrade Pa Chin your dream about Chairman Mao," said a Honanese named Wang Kuo-hsing encouragingly.

But Huang shook his head in some embarrassment, and ran off along the trench.

No one chased after him. The leader of the Third Squad turned round and explained to me, "Huang is a good comrade. Everybody here is fond of him. He doesn't like to talk about himself. His one wish in life is to win a citation, First Class, and see Chairman Mao whom he saw once in a dream."

"Well, who doesn't want to see Chairman Mao?" put in Chen Ta-jen.

He got to his feet and strolled towards the trench, humming *Tung Fang Hung*.*

III

That day, before dusk, Huang Wen-yuan came to see me as I was sitting at the entrance of the bunker glancing over a pictorial magazine I had borrowed from company headquarters. I asked him to stay and tell me his dream about Chairman Mao.

Huang squatted down with a smile, and started scratching the ground with a chip of stone. He opened his mouth to speak, but no words came. After a while he looked at me smilingly with his dark eyes. Then he said:

"All right, let me tell you. Actually there isn't much to say. About a month ago, after hearing the report given by our Volunteers' delegates about their trip back home, I longed more than ever to see Chairman Mao

* A popular song in praise of Chairman Mao and the Communist Party of China. It begins with: "Red in the east rises the sun."

myself. I was feeling extraordinarily good that day. I dreamed I was taking part in a battle, a furious one. I was guarding a hilltop which the enemy was attacking. I had a magnetic hand grenade and a hand grenade which I threw at the enemy. The enemy was beaten back and I was awarded a citation and sent back to see Chairman Mao. I dreamed that I was talking with Chairman Mao. I had so much to tell him, but I couldn't get it out. I told him that I was a Youth League member, but then I began stuttering and couldn't go on. In desperation, I woke up. I was mighty happy. I immediately woke up the squad leader and said, 'Listen, I've seen Chairman Mao.' He said, 'You're only dreaming.' Then I told him, 'I dreamed I was fighting and then won a citation and went back to see Chairman Mao.' The next day the squad leader told the others, and so everybody knows. They laughed at me, but I know they all want to see Chairman Mao."

He was flushed, not with embarrassment but with excitement. Then he bent his head again and wrote something on the ground with the stone.

"I'm sure your dream will come true," said I to encourage him. "Haven't you been awarded a citation, Third Class? It won't be difficult for you to win another citation, First Class."

I saw that he was scratching the characters *Chueh Hsin* (determination) on the ground. They were not particularly well written, but the strokes were very clear.

"Suppose you did see Chairman Mao," I asked, "what would you say to him? Have you ever thought of that?"

He did not answer me immediately. After a while, he said, "I haven't thought it out very well. But I know one thing I'd say: Whatever happens, I shan't disgrace you."

As he said this, he fixed his eyes on me. I was deeply moved by the sincerity and earnestness of his expression. Not wanting to disturb his train of thought with a random remark, I remained silent.

After three months in Korea in the midst of men like Huang Wen-yuan, I was used to their way of life and could understand how they felt. The more I pondered his remark, the more it stirred me. Huang Wen-yuan had not spoken casually, but with deep feeling. That emotion of his moved me. I rolled up the magazine and walked out of the bunker to stroll up and down the trench for a long time. What occupied my mind was not Huang's remark, but the land across the Yalu River where I was born and bred, and the people living and working there. But my thoughts followed each other at random. From time to time, I felt a surge of warmth. I was happy. My heart was filled with love, which I was eager to dedicate to others. I could not help muttering to myself: "I understand him. Yes, I understand him."

Thus I tried to understand Huang's emotion in terms of my own, and I thought I had succeeded.

I stayed up rather late that night. I stood by a small tree in front of the bunker. In the pale moonlight I could see the undulating hills

all around, and the bushes on them. The searchlight over the sky above the conference site at Panmunjom rose from behind my bunker like a column of light. The drone of a plane could be heard. In the distance, there seemed to be three lanterns hung from the sky—the enemy was dropping flares again. The enemy guns fired spasmodically. After a few shells, silence would fall again.

The enemy had been dragging on the negotiations for armistice at the expense of Korean mothers and their children. The gunfire and the distant hills wrapped in darkness made me think of home—China must be brilliant with lights. I wished I had someone to talk to. I badly needed someone to share the feelings that were surging in my heart. But there was no one around. All the men were asleep.

I knew there were still sentries awake. They were vigilantly on guard all the time. But I did not want to disturb them. I stood there by myself for a long, long time.

IV

I did not sleep very well that night. In the morning, I overslept and did not wake until somebody called. It was again Huang Wen-yuan, who came to see me like an old friend.

"Comrade, are you ill?" Huang stood by my *kang* and asked with concern.

"No, I'm quite all right," I replied as I jumped off the *kang*.

"You must take good care of yourself," he urged me. "These last few days, a lot of our people have got malaria. Our squad leader had an attack last night. If ever you don't feel well, let me know immediately and I'll send for the medical officer. Suppose you get ill, think how worried your family would be!"

"Thank you," said I, "I'll take good care of myself. And what about yourself? Have you ever been ill since you came to Korea?"

"I may not be tall, but I'm tough," said he with boyish pride. "I never get ill. Life here is really splendid. We study and work together and all get along fine with each other. When I told my family this, they all felt pleased."

"Do you write your family often? How are they?" I interrupted.

"I write them every two or three weeks. My father and mother can't read. My two sisters are still small. When I volunteered last May, our *hsiang* was just carrying out the reduction of rent and the refund of land deposits. My father used to rent land from a landlord. In his last letter he told me that he has been given a plot of land. Life is much better now. One of my sisters is going to school." He told me his story all in one breath, and before I could say anything, he went out with a salute.

It rained before breakfast. At first there was just a drizzle, but

during breakfast it grew into a downpour. After the meal I walked back. It was less than twenty steps, and yet my raincoat was soaked.

Sitting inside the bunker, I made up my diary for the last few days. I remembered that a small group discussion meeting was scheduled to be held, so I went out in the rain to the Third Squad.

The men were sitting on three separate *kangs*. When I arrived, the discussion was already under way. The leader of the Third Squad who had had malaria the night before was sitting on a stool by the entrance of the bunker. He stood up to let me pass. Other comrades squeezed closer together to make room for me. I got onto the *kang* and sat next to Huang Wen-yuan.

Chen Ta-jen had been speaking as I came in. I had interrupted him, but now he continued. The light in the bunker was so dim that I could hardly make out their individual faces. But Chen sat right opposite me. He was near the entrance, so I could see the serious expression on his face. All the time he spoke he was looking outside the bunker.

"... To defend Kaesong, we need confidence as well as determination," he said. "We mustn't rely on others, but on ourselves. Our commanding officers have instructed us to fight for every inch of ground. In order to do that, we must first unite as one, and secondly we must be afraid of nothing, not even death. . . ."

Hardly had Chen Ta-jen closed his mouth when Huang Wen-yuan shouted, "Let me speak!" Wang Kuo-hsing also asked to speak. But since Huang made the request first, the squad leader gave him the floor.

Huang was keyed up from the outset. He kept his eyes down. His voice was low, and trembled slightly. He was another person from the lad I knew.

"The eyes of the whole world are fixed on us," he said. "We must not disappoint them. . . . Aeroplanes and guns we have, but we must first of all have courage and determination. We must be ready, if necessary, to fight alone. No matter how many enemy forces attack us, we'll eventually finish them all. . . ."

He spoke very slowly, and not without difficulty. His forehead was beaded with sweat. It seemed as if he had more to say but could not find the right words. Suddenly he concluded huskily, "That's all." Taking out a handkerchief from his pocket he mopped his face. Comrade Wang Kuo-hsing then took his turn.

The discussion went on in dead earnest. Each man spoke his mind. Though they used different words, their ideas were the same and their hearts were united like one.

When the meeting was over, it was still raining. I left first and returned to my own bunker.

As soon as I stepped into my bunker and hung up my raincoat, I saw Huang pass by with another youngster heading for the right. They were wearing oilskins and carrying a shovel and a hoe. Half an hour later they came back again.

"Comrade Huang Wen-yuan!" I called twice from the bunker. He had already passed, but he turned back and came in.

"Did you call me, comrade?" he asked with a smile. Raindrops were streaming down his oilskin like beads. He leaned his hoe against the wall.

"Where have you just been to?" I asked.

"The squad leader told us to go and have a look at the ammunition depot. It's raining so heavily, he was afraid it might get flooded. We're glad to find it isn't," replied Huang.

Then he looked around my bunker and said, "You must be careful, comrade. If the rain doesn't stop today, then before daybreak this bunker will be flooded again. All these mountains here are of sandstone. Once it rains, the place is soaked."

It was quite true. The walls of the cave were damp and the ground glimmered with water. I didn't want to keep him, so I tried to conclude the conversation by remarking, "Well, luckily the rainy season in Korea is over."

"I wouldn't say that it's completely over. Still, we shouldn't have too much trouble with these bunkers." He paused, then added, "I'll be around soon."

Picking up his hoe, he went out of the bunker into the rain.

V

That afternoon, Huang Wen-yuan brought me to battalion headquarters. He carried his rifle and wore a cap made of twigs and leaves for camouflage. We walked along the trenches, climbing onto the slope when the trenches were flooded. Zigzag paths had been trodden out among the bushes. On occasion we had to jump over several trenches. While finding our way among the bushes, Huang often turned back to ask whether I was tired and needed a rest. Now and then he would stop and take my arm. At times, he would look up to see if there were any planes about.

We talked to each other on the way.

"I understand you were keeping guard all last night. Didn't you sleep at all?" I asked.

"Yes, I did," he replied cheerfully. "I had a nap this morning. I was glad the rain stopped later last night. Oh, life is very comfortable now. We're short of nothing. Even vitamin tablets are issued. Men who were in the fifth campaign said that was hard all right. Yet we won in spite of the hardships!"

I asked whether he had taken part in any combat.

"Only that once when I captured two Americans with our deputy squad leader Lu Fang-tse," he replied smilingly. "He's gone back home to study now."

That reminded me of something. "Were you awarded a citation because of that?" I asked.

He stalked forward without turning his head, and answered briefly, "Oh, I didn't do much. It was mostly the deputy squad leader's work."

Just then, he came to a rather wide trench. He cleared it in a jump, then turned round to tell me to be careful and to help me across.

I jumped over. Then I asked him to tell me how he won his award.

"There isn't much to say," replied he, quickening his pace. "It's very simple, and can be said in a few words."

I urged him again. He stopped and looked over his shoulder, saying, "All right, I'll tell you about it."

He waited until I caught him up. Then he walked on again, but less quickly than before. We were then ascending a hill.

"It happened over a month ago when we recaptured that nameless height which the enemy bombed this morning," he said. "I was in the shock attack group. Our demolition squad broke through the enemy's barbed-wire entanglements, and we advanced under cover of fire. The deputy platoon leader ordered us to attack and we charged. Ordinarily I'm not a good runner, but I charged straight up. We blew up the enemy fortifications which our gunfire hadn't been able to demolish. When the enemy saw no hope of checking our attack, they tried to run away. They fired a number of shells which exploded in the air. Only a few of our comrades were wounded. I found a foxhole and fought from there for a spell. Then we searched the battlefield for any remaining enemy. I was with the deputy squad leader, and we found two American soldiers hiding in a trench. Both of them were tall fellows. We ordered them to come out, but they refused to obey. The deputy squad leader was very tough, and he simply dragged one of them out. The other was frightened to death. He came out with his hands up. So the deputy squad leader and I each grabbed a prisoner in our left hands, and carried two rifles in our right. When we got back, the men laughed at me, saying I was a little fellow to have caught such a tall chap. I was offered a citation but I told them I didn't deserve it. Liu Kwang-tse took sixty-three prisoners single-handed. That was a feat! I'll win the citation later."

"You certainly have grand ideas," I was moved to say. He had spoken briefly and seemed reluctant to relate his story. But what he said enthralled me. I felt happy and excited as we walked along together. "Have you plans for winning a citation?" I asked.

"Every one in our squad has his plan," he answered in a low voice. Apparently he did not wish to go further into the subject. By then we had reached the top of the hill. He turned and asked me if I needed a rest.

My underclothes were soaked with sweat, but I did not feel tired. I knew we were not far from battalion headquarters, and I was anxious to get there before I rested, so I said, "No, I'm not tired. But we might walk more slowly."

"All right," said he. As we went over the ridge, he suddenly asked, "You'll be here some time yet, won't you, comrade?"

"I can't say for certain," I replied casually, not knowing what he meant exactly. "Maybe a month or so."

"A month or so?" he muttered to himself. Then he turned around and said, "That's too short."

I did not reply right away. Suddenly he said with feeling, "Please don't laugh at me. I really hope to win an award before you leave."

"In that case I'll wait for you to do it," I replied with a smile. I was going to say more, but just then I stumbled over some broken twigs and a stone. Had I not caught hold of a pine tree in time, I would have fallen down.

"Mind yourself!" cried Huang Wen-yuan, as he caught me quickly by the arm. Thus our conversation was cut short, and we could not resume it because by now we had reached battalion headquarters.

VI

In the battalion headquarters I met the regiment commander, who was to preside at the meeting to check up on the preparations for a counter-attack. He was just the same as when I had last seen him, nearly three weeks before: smiling, full of energy, and younger-looking than either the battalion commander or the company commander. Shaking me warmly by the hand, he said: "We've missed you. The division commander rang up to ask after you. Now you will have a chance to see some fighting." He laughed.

At the meeting every face was serious. Many took the floor, including all the officers of various ranks who were concerned with the task. The regiment commander listened to each of them attentively, and his own comments were brief and to the point. He made an excellent chairman.

The meeting lasted nearly four hours and ended at seven after a full discussion of the task. The regiment commander, battalion commander and battalion political instructor asked me to stay at battalion headquarters for the night, for they were afraid that I was not used to walking in the mountains at night. They were so kind that I could not but agree. As he left for his own headquarters, the regiment commander gripped my hand and assured me: "You'll be hearing good news from us!" I beamed at him. For I realised he meant that I would soon see some good fighting.

The instructor insisted that I stay with him that night. But before turning in, I sat on the battalion commander's *kang* to listen to some of his experiences. He was a man of about thirty, and had lost his left thumb. His *kang* was in a small bunker off a larger one. In front of the *kang* was a square wooden table, on which were a pile of documents and a telephone.

After telling me about a messenger who had lost his life in the fifth campaign last year, he suddenly broke off. By the dim light of a vegetable oil lamp made out of a tin I could see how solemn he looked, and something of his grief communicated itself to me. It was time to turn in, but I was unwilling to leave him at such a moment. I glanced at the stone wall of the cave, and my eyes fell on several coloured pictures which had been cut from some pictorial. From one picture, a boy and girl wearing the red Pioneer scarves were smiling at me.

"Comrade Commander, have you a child?" I asked, pointing to the picture.

"I have a daughter," he said, turning his eyes to the picture. "She is about that age." Nodding his head, he slowly broke into a smile. "She's taken good care of. All the children at home are taken good care of now." After a slight pause he looked at me with concern, and said, "You had better go to bed early. You must be very tired today."

He told a messenger to take me to the place where I was to spend the night. In a quarter of an hour I was lying on the instructor's *kang*. When I blew out the lamp the chilly bunker became pitch dark, and suddenly what Huang Wen-yuan had said flashed to my mind. I seemed to see his smiling round face. I was glad for him, because I knew that very soon he would have the chance he had been waiting for so long.

VII

It was drizzling the next morning. And although the rain stopped in less than two hours, the sky remained overcast. After keeping me for breakfast, the battalion commander and the instructor sent a messenger to escort me back to the Third Squad.

Upon my arrival at company headquarters, the company political instructor and the deputy commander asked me to stay there. I jotted down some materials I needed and continued on my way only after supper. The instructor and the deputy commander went along with me, taking a messenger with them. At one point the deputy commander, who was walking ahead, turned to me to ask: "What do you think of Huang Wen-yuan?"

"A good man. I like him very much." I replied frankly.

"I agree. He is all right in everything except in reading and writing. I hope you'll help him in that." He turned back to look at me with a twinkle in his eyes, fingering the wound on his chin.

"Comrade Deputy Commander, is your wound still septic?" I asked.

"It's practically better now," he answered, still smiling.

Just then we reached the end of the trench occupied by the First Platoon, and seeing the First Platoon leader and the deputy leader coming toward us, we cut short our talk. They halted, saluted the instructor and the deputy commander, and answered their questions. Then they joined us and walked slowly behind the company officers. Thinking that

they must have something to report to their superiors, I quickened my pace and went ahead.

As I passed the bunker of the Third Squad, I saw Huang Wen-yuan at the entrance, bending over a low wooden table giving all his attention to something he was writing. Wang Kuo-hsing stood talking behind him. I walked across to look over Huang's shoulder and found he was writing for the wall-newspaper. He had drawn with his fountain pen a soldier fetching water, and below this picture he had written:

*Our Wang Kuo-hsing is really not bad.
He carries more water than others, that lad!
The buckets are full.
He carries them fast. . . .*

"That cap doesn't look like a cap! It looks like a woman's hair," Wang protested from behind.

Huang Wen-yuan said nothing, but stopped writing and put his head on one side to consider the drawing carefully.

"Look here. Do our caps look like that?" Wang continued.

Huang remained silent. He turned round to look at Wang, then fixed his eyes on the drawing again. Suddenly he chuckled. He stood up and stepped across to where the wall-newspaper was posted to scan a picture cut from a pictorial of one of the Volunteers' delegates who had gone back home. Then coming back with an air of confidence, he said with a smile: "I see now!" Huang bent down again. Cutting off a slip of paper, he pasted it over the head he had already drawn and drew another head in a cap. He took the greatest care with each stroke. When the drawing was finished, he turned round again to Wang Kuo-hsing and asked: "How does it look now?"

"The cap is all right, but the face is not!"

"I'm no artist, I'm a fighter," retorted Huang with a smile. "Isn't that right, Comrade Pa Chin?"

I smiled. Before I could answer, Wang Kuo-hsing cut in: "You are wrong. Everybody says there's nothing a Volunteer can't do!"

Huang stopped smiling. After a little thought he said slowly: "You are right. Since coming to Korea, I can't tell you how many things I have learned." He took up his pen to go on with the rhyme in praise of Wang Kuo-hsing. When he had finished writing, he read it through, then put the pen back into his pocket and stood up saying: "I shall learn to do better." Then he took what he had written into the bunker.

I went back to my bunker. It was dark and damp, but the water in the flask was hot. After drinking some water, I went out again to see the instructor and the deputy commander. When I passed the bunker of the Third Squad, Huang Wen-yuan was leaning against the trench softly reading out a letter. Wang Kuo-hsing and Chen Ta-jen were squatting beside a low table, playing chess.

"Is it a letter from your family?" I asked casually.

"It arrived today!" he looked up with a smile.

"How are your people?"

"Very well. They all want me to win a citation."

"Have they heard of the citation you were awarded for what you did on the nameless height?"

"Not yet. But they expect me to do better than that!" He lowered his voice as if afraid of being overheard by his two friends nearby.

"Good!" My one-word answer was fraught with meaning if only he had known it. I could not tell him straight out that his chance was coming. I was sure, though, that he would succeed in his plan before long.

VIII

The chance which Huang Wen-yuan had been awaiting came at long last. One morning two weeks later the Third Squad leader, who had recovered from malaria, came to inform me that the regiment commander would like to see me that night, and would be sending someone in the afternoon to fetch me.

I knew why I was being sent for. As a matter of fact I had already guessed something from the manoeuvres of the Third Squad during the last few days. I was too excited to stay sitting in my bunker. So I went out. The man I most wanted to see was Huang Wen-yuan. I had nothing special to say to him. I only wanted to see what he was doing at that time. When I reached the Third Squad bunker, I found all the men of the squad there, either cleaning their weapons or fixing their camouflage. I saw serious faces as well as cheerful smiles. Huang Wen-yuan had his tommy gun on a low bench, and was giving it a going-over. He nodded at me with a smile, but said nothing. Chen Ta-jen, who stood by the side of the trench preparing camouflage for his cap, flashed me a highly expressive smile. The Third Squad leader came out of the bunker and criticized one of the men for the defects in his camouflage. He examined each man in turn, and then called them all into the bunker for a talk.

Remaining outside, I could not hear what he was saying, although I could make a guess at it. He came out after about ten minutes, and came up and stood by my side for a while. He seemed eager to speak to me, and I had something to say to him; but when our eyes met, we exchanged only a few incomplete sentences. We were both thinking of the same thing, but neither of us could put it into words. However, conscious that I should not keep him at such a time as this, I said goodbye and left him.

At breakfast I went to the Third Squad's bunker again, and found all the men of the squad there. This time very few made jokes. They were eating heartily but talking little. There was a certain solemnity in the air, but it did not make me uncomfortable. My eyes travelled

from face to face and came to rest several times on Huang Wen-yuan. You could see that the men were serenely happy for all their solemnity, and that they were looking forward to the coming battle.

After breakfast I had a chance to speak to Huang Wen-yuan. He was unusually quiet. He said nothing about the approaching event—did not so much as hint at it. He only said that he had written his parents a letter, in which he had told them about me and said that on my return home I might go to see them and tell them how well he and his comrades got on in Korea.

"I don't know yet where your home is," I interrupted.

"When you leave us, I'll give you the address," he answered.

Our talk failed to warm up. Knowing that he was going to take part in a group discussion, I left him and returned to my bunker to rest. After quite a time I went to see them again and found that the meeting was still going on. I made my way along the trench to the bunker of the Second Squad. The men there were holding a discussion too. I went farther on to the bunker of the First Squad, and a similar meeting was being held there.

I returned to my bunker and had a nap for more than an hour. Then I got up, had a drink of water, and left to visit the Third Squad again. The men were sitting in the bunker, listening to the instructor. Realising how busy they must be today, I did not disturb them.

I saw no more of them till supper. They ate quickly and talked very little, although the atmosphere was friendly. When Huang Wen-yuan finished eating, he exchanged some words with me and disappeared. Chen Ta-jen was putting things straight in the bunker, while the others were busy too. Aware that zero hour was near, I began to feel tense. I could see signs of excitement too on the faces of a few fighters.

I walked on along the trench, past the First and Second Squads. In both places the men were busy. Huang Wen-yuan was talking to a young comrade of the First Squad. He greeted me with a smile when he saw me passing. I walked on, pondering the great event to come. I was imagining the victory of the counter-attack and how triumphantly Huang would be coming back, when a familiar voice called my name. I looked up with a start, to see an orderly saluting me. He was from regiment headquarters.

"Have you come for me, Little Ting?" I asked with a smile.

"The regiment commander told me to fetch you," answered Little Ting. "The horses are at the foot of the hill."

"Will you come with me to fetch something first?"

"No hurry, it's early." Saying this, Little Ting followed me to my bunker.

IX

When Little Ting and I started for the regiment headquarters before dusk, all the fighters of the First, Second and Third Squads had left their bunkers. I was sorry not to have said goodbye to them.

We went by a roundabout way, because Little Ting was not taking any chances—he would rather take the longer road by the trenches than the short cut across the hillside, to avoid the constant leaping over the trenches. We had just climbed onto the slope, when a file of men emerged from a side trench, carrying weapons and wearing their camouflage. In strict silence they took another turning and went down the hill. I stopped to watch them. Those in front were the men of the First Squad, next came those of the Second Squad and then the Third Squad leader. I descended a few steps to take a closer look, and was seen by Chen Ta-jen, who faintly smiled and nodded at me. Immediately after him was Huang Wen-yuan. Huang nodded and smiled to me too, but so quickly that only a close watcher could have caught the action. There were many others behind Huang, and I followed each one with my eyes. I did not wave to them, but in my heart I was saying: "I wish you victory!"

Before these men had all marched past, I turned to Little Ting who was silently standing beside me. "Let's go," I said. I could tell from his eyes how envious he was.

X

I arrived at the regiment headquarters long after it was dusk. Both the regiment commander and the commissar were absent, but they had left word for Little Ting to take me to the division headquarters. I took a few minutes' rest in the commissar's office, where I had a talk with Comrade Chiang and drank some water. Then I rode on to the division headquarters.

Although it was so late, the leading divisional cadres were still at the meeting. A staff officer fixed me up for the night.

I saw the division commissar and the chief of staff the next morning, and learned from them that their meeting had gone on very late the previous night, but early in the morning the division commander had gone out. They asked me to rest during the day and promised to take me to the command post after supper.

"Everything is under control. It's all going according to plan." The commissar's eyes sparkled and he spoke confidently. "Our units have all taken up their appointed positions, while there is no sign of movement on the enemy's side. We are sure to take the height tonight.

"Tonight you will see for yourself how accurately and promptly our fighters perform their tasks. You have been living among them for quite a time, and have come to know most of them. You think they are ordinary people, don't you? Wait till you see them fight — then you

will understand them better." With a smile, the commissar picked up his enamel mug and took a sip of tea.

He said much more than this. And what he said so fired my imagination that I was unable to rest.

But at last the time came for us to set out.

The commissar went with me, and we had two orderlies with us. All the others had gone already. Before it was completely dark, we arrived at a hilltop overgrown with shrubs. The division commander and some staff officers were in the command post while some others were standing under the trees outside. The commissar and I stood under a chestnut tree.

"It's that height over there, the one to the right of that red hilltop. There are several big trees on it." The commissar showed me the target. "Keep your eyes on your watch. The moment it's time, you'll hear our guns." This said, he went into the command post.

I waited as the seconds ticked by, sometimes looking at my watch and sometimes turning to the height. All was quiet, and it was getting darker and darker. Before the height was completely swallowed up in darkness, I heard a whisper in my ear: "It's time now!" I had just turned my head towards the commissar, when our big guns opened fire.

I saw dazzling flashes as our artillery pounded the enemy from all directions. The explosions were deafening.

"How accurate their aim is!" the commissar exclaimed. Our artillery was aiming at two other hills as well. Nearly every shell reached its objective.

"The enemy's guns have been silenced," he continued with satisfaction.

Our barrage lasted for only ten minutes. Knowing that Huang Wen-yuan and his comrades would go into action soon, I kept my eyes fixed on the height. Suddenly I saw a burst of flame which flung out threads of light like a firework and then vanished. After a short interval there came another such flash which was followed by a third.

"They've broken through the barbed-wire entanglements," the commissar told me.

A green spark soared up from the height, flared up in mid air and vanished. Wondering what it was, I turned to the commissar.

"It's the enemy's signal," he said.

A red spark followed. It seemed brighter and flew higher than the first, but it too went out after a while.

"We are going to storm them," the commissar whispered in my ear.

Before long two other red sparks rose brightly in the dark sky, and I heard the commissar's voice again:

"The enemy's frontline has been broken through. It took only a few minutes."

I was overjoyed. There flashed across my mind a picture of Huang Wen-yuan charging with his tommy gun and hurling hand grenades.

Meanwhile my eyes were fastened on the hilltop. The brilliant lights of bangalore torpedoes were blazing on the height. They were followed by flashes of a different kind.

"The enemy is firing shells to burst in the air," the commissar said. As I kept on watching, I heard someone telling him: "The enemy are still resisting. They are throwing grenades." No sooner had he finished speaking than three red sparks rose into the sky.

"We have taken the enemy's position," the commissar announced, more cheerfully than ever. Looking at the luminous dial of his watch, he added: "It didn't take too much time."

Turning back toward the height, I saw intermittent flashes from the enemy's guns. It was getting colder. One of the orderlies who had come with us put a cotton-padded overcoat over my shoulders.

"Do you remember what I told you this morning? How accurately and promptly they act. . . ." Before the commissar could finish his sentence, the division commander had come up to us. Shaking hands with me, he told us in his clear, crisp voice:

"The fight is over. We're mopping up now. Everything has been successfully carried out according to plan." I sensed his joy and shared in it.

A staff officer came up and spoke to him, then went back to the command post. The commander continued: "In fact, for the fighters it was not simple. This was a small operation, but even from this you can see that the longer we fight, the stronger we become. When we make up our mind to take a height, we can do it." Then he said to the commissar: "Will you see Comrade Pa Chin back? I'm staying here."

I took a last look at the height which we had just taken. It was pitch dark, and nothing could be seen. The enemy was firing only intermittently further along the front, but I could see no movement.

I went back with the commissar.

XI

That night there was inexpressible joy in my heart: I had seen a victory! I wanted to convey the news of this victory at once to the people back home. I thought of Huang Wen-yuan and Chen Ta-jen, of the Third Squad leader and many other comrades. The political instructor, the battalion commander, the regiment commander, the division commander and the commissar all came to my mind. I dreamed that I had returned to China, to Szechuan, Huang Wen-yuan's native place. I told his parents and his two sisters how he had won a citation. How warmly the family received me!

The next morning I saw the division commander and the commissar. The commander pressed my hand and said: "We scored a great victory. And this time there was an unusually heroic figure. You must go and get the news, it's wonderful material for you." He was elated.

"Who is it? From which company, which platoon?" I asked in surprised delight, because I knew that besides the First Platoon of the First Company another platoon from the Second Company had taken part in the battle the previous day.

"It's Huang Wen-yuan, a fighter in the company where you are. A Youth League member." The commissar's voice showed that he too was stirred.

"Ah, Huang Wen-yuan! Why, I know him very well. Where is he now? I'll go right away and see him." I was very glad and didn't pause to think before I asked my question.

"He died for his country," said the commissar simply. Then he added, "I'm very sorry I never had a good talk with him."

I was stunned. For a long time I could say nothing.

The division commander sat on a low chair made out of a wooden box and smoked in silence. Then he threw the cigarette stub down, stood up, took a few paces about the mud hut, then stopped in front of me. "Comrade," he said, "promise me you will do your best to write something about him. Please write something. Feelings like his aren't simple. We shouldn't let them remain unknown. Such fine qualities as his. . . . I really don't know how to describe them. . . ."

"We should let the people back home know about him . . ." the commissar put in.

"But I am still not clear. . . ." I was cut short in the middle of a sentence by the appearance of breakfast.

"So it's settled then," said the commissar. "After breakfast, we'll send you to regiment headquarters. The political department has already sent men to collect material."

"All right," I agreed. "And from regiment headquarters I'll go straight back to the company."

During breakfast I talked about Huang Wen-yuan while the commander and the commissar listened. I told them all I knew about him, but still they pressed for further details.

When I was leaving for regiment headquarters, the commander shook me warmly by the hand. Smiling at me with friendly eyes, he said: "Please call us if you meet with any difficulty in your work."

The commissar accompanied me all the way to where the horses were waiting. I cantered down the mountain path, followed by a messenger. Turning my head I saw the commissar standing under the poplars, waving his hand.

XII

In the mud hut of the political director of the regiment I was surprised to see Chen Ta-jen. He stood up to greet me. I shook hands with him, not knowing what to say, then I smiled and said the first thing

that came into my head: "You are back!" I knew my smile must seem forced, and involuntarily I blurted out: "What happened to Comrade Huang Wen-yuan?"

Tears sprang to his eyes. He bit his lips and answered in a low voice: "I saw him die with my own eyes. He really had guts."

He sat down and, having answered a few questions put by the director, turned his red eyes to gaze at me as if I were one of his own kin. There were no tears in his eyes now, only love and hate.

"Comrade Chen Ta-jen, please tell us about yesterday's battle, yesterday's victory," I finally said entreatingly. Actually what I wanted most to hear was the story of Huang Wen-yuan's heroism, but I didn't want to upset Chen at this juncture.

"All right." He nodded, and fixed his eyes on the ground. "The day before yesterday when we set out in the evening we met you on the way. When we arrived at the place where we were to conceal ourselves, it was already pitch dark. We divided into groups of three and hid ourselves in the wild grass. Huang Wen-yuan, Wang Kuo-hsing and I were in one group and we were less than one hundred metres from the enemy's barbed-wire entanglements on the height. Near us there was not a single big tree, nothing but wild grass and some small pines. The enemy was very much on the alert. Even when a pheasant flapped its wings and flew off, they would be startled into letting loose a round of machinegun fire or a few shots of mortar. But although the enemy was shrewd, our camouflage was very good: we had wild grass, leaves and branches stuck all over us so that no one could see us. And our men's discipline was good. Nobody stirred or let out a sound, so the enemy had no chance to discover anything. We managed like that until two o'clock in the afternoon of the next day. Then there were only a few hours to go before the attack. The nearer the time came, the more excited we felt, but we kept cool, not budging so much as an inch. I was nearest to Huang Wen-yuan—only about four metres away. There was a boulder beside me, but because I was on higher ground I could see him very clearly. Now and then I would look at him and he would look at me. We would smile at each other. I can still see his smile now."

Chen stopped speaking, keeping his head lowered. "Have a drink of water, and rest a bit," said the director gently. The young fighter lifted his head and looked at us. His eyes were red, but they were dry. He shook his head and said: "No, I'll go on."

"About one o'clock the enemy had started firing blindly. We knew that was because they were scared and were firing to keep up their courage. However, we became even more alert. Shortly after two o'clock an incendiary shell dropped near Huang Wen-yuan. When I looked at him the wild grass of his camouflage had already caught fire, and he was half covered with flames. He twisted a little towards the right and moved his left hand, but he couldn't put out the fire. Soon his clothes were on

fire too. Frantically, I motioned to him with my head. I wanted him to roll on the ground, not thinking what the consequences of that would be. But I dared not speak and he didn't notice me. If he had stood up, of course, it wouldn't have been difficult to put out the fire, or if he had rolled over and over on the ground he could probably have managed it too. But in either case he would have exposed us to the enemy, and then not only would we have failed in our counter-attack, but our two platoons would have run the risk of being wiped out. The fire burned so fast, I felt terrible. I wanted so badly to run over and help him put it out, but I couldn't. He would never let me. And I remembered what our officers had emphasised before we set out: 'In this attack, everything depends on your camouflage, your coolness and above all your discipline. A man mustn't under any circumstances give away our position to the enemy.' Just then our chiefs must have seen the fire where we were, because they ordered the artillery to pound the enemy position so as to distract their attention. I saw Huang Wen-yuan push his gun and his bangalore torpedo as far from him as possible. The fire was all over him. At first he tried to slap it out, but he didn't stand up, and a few cautious slaps weren't any use. Then he simply stopped moving. He lay there quietly on his stomach, digging his fingers into the earth and letting the fire burn him. At first he had his chin on the ground, staring straight ahead. Suddenly he turned to look at me. His round face was all red and beaded with perspiration; his lips were clamped together and his eyes were horribly bright. One look at him and I knew what agony he must be in. He was quivering, and the muscles on his face were twitching. His hands clawed deeper and deeper into the earth until they were buried in it. I knew every second must be hell for him, but he didn't even groan. I was afraid to look at him, yet I couldn't help looking. I had to grit my teeth too. I'd my gun in one hand, clutching at the grass with the other, and it was all I could do to stop myself from getting up to save him. But his eyes were fixed on me steadily, as if he were saying to me: 'Comrade, don't bother about me, go in and win.' I couldn't stand it. I closed my eyes. Suddenly I heard him calling me softly, and I opened my eyes. His head was slightly raised and he whispered: 'I'm giving all I've got for our country. But I can't finish the job I was given. You take my weapons. Go in and win!' The fire was fairly blazing by then—even his hair was aflame. The pain got so bad, he burrowed his head into the ground, pressing his face down—but not a cry out of him. He didn't move again. His whole body was wrapped in flames. . . ."

Chen Ta-jen rubbed his eyes, and lifting his head sighed softly. We looked at him in silence. I set my teeth, unable to utter a word. I seemed to see young Huang Wen-yuan's round face before me, not smiling now but wrapped in flames. After a moment Chen Ta-jen said in a whisper, as if to himself: "Every time I talk of it, I can see him."

After another pause he went on:

"There was no wind that day. The fire burned slowly, it burned for twenty minutes. And so he died. He really did give all he had for our country. Sparks flew onto my face, but I didn't feel any pain. There was only hatred in my heart, and I vowed to avenge him. All the men knew what had happened. It made them hate the enemy's guts. Honest, we could scarcely wait for the signal to attack. When the time finally came, our big guns pounded the enemy position and smashed their bunkers. As soon as the artillery stopped, we started out. I ran to the body of Huang Wen-yuan, covered him with my padded overcoat and took his tommy gun and bangalore torpedo. Our demolition squad broke through the three lines of barbed wire one after another, then I charged with the shock attack group. Every man was beside himself, yelling: "Revenge Huang Wen-yuan!" There was such a fury in us, we were willing to give our lives to finish off the enemy. Their resistance crumpled. They hid themselves in the few bunkers that were left, and threw hand grenades at us. We shouted at them to surrender, but they wouldn't. Finally we had to thrust bangalore torpedoes into the bunkers and blow them up with the men inside. In only fifteen minutes we occupied the whole position."

When Chen Ta-jen finished, he bent his head, and coughed softly. No one else made a sound. I could see nothing but a mass of flame and a smiling face. . . . I seemed to hear a resolute voice: "I'm giving all I've got."

"Do you have any more questions, comrade?" the director was asking me. I turned to look at him. "If not," he continued, "let Chen go and rest, he's fagged out."

"I'm all right," Chen Ta-jen put in.

With a start I looked at Chen Ta-jen. This was the face of another young man, who was now Huang Wen-yuan's closest comrade-in-arms. It was he who had made use of Huang Wen-yuan's gun and bangalore torpedo, and it was to him that Huang Wen-yuan had whispered his last words. In him I caught a glimpse of Huang Wen-yuan himself.

"Did Huang Wen-yuan leave any other message?" I asked with my eyes on him.

"No," Chen answered briefly. He thought for a moment, then added: "The day before yesterday, after we met you in the trench, he whispered to me: 'I should have given my home address to Comrade Pa Chin.' I didn't answer. I didn't think it mattered, because he could easily give it to you after we got back. I didn't know that he would never come back." He could not go on and again bent his head.

The director stood up, saying: "Comrade Chen Ta-jen, you go and rest."

I got up at once. Chen Ta-jen did the same. After he had saluted us, I shook his hand hard and after a pause managed to say: "I'll wait for you to return to our squad together."

I stayed at regiment headquarters for the day, then returned to the Third Squad with Chen Ta-jen.

Everything was the same in my bunker; there was little change in my life. I still ate with the Third Squad and continued to take part in the men's activities. There was another casualty in the squad besides Huang Wen-yuan, who had been sent to a hospital. As I became better friends with the other men, I realised this squad had a special place in my heart. One day when the regiment commander came, he said jokingly: "You would make a good deputy leader for this squad." How proud that made me!

I have said that everything was the same, but that is not true, or only superficially so. Very quickly, I noticed that life here was not the same as before. I missed Huang Wen-yuan. Sometimes when I was sitting in my bunker alone I would see him standing before me, his face aflame. But when I was with the men of the Third Squad, I felt as if he were beside us, listening to our conversation. This was because the men talked of him all the time as if he were still alive and would always be with us. Everyone had a feeling of respect and love for him, and he was taken as a model in everything. His name was an inspiration to all his comrades-in-arms. "We mustn't do anything that he'd be ashamed of," they said. All of them were proud of the fact that they had been in the same squad as Huang Wen-yuan. They worked harder, studied better and were more united than ever before.

One morning I heard the instructor tell the leaders of the First Platoon and the Third Squad: ". . . This squad is all right. Any job they're given—it gets done. Every man's another Huang Wen-yuan."

That evening Wang Kuo-hsing was playing chess with Chen Ta-jen. He suddenly stood up and said: "There'll never be a coward in Huang Wen-yuan's squad."

When Chen Ta-jen saw me passing he called to me: "Comrade, there's a letter from Huang Wen-yuan's family." He took out a letter from his right hand pocket, and added: "The instructor said to show it to you."

I took the letter and smoothed it out to read it. It was from his father, not a very long letter but telling him several things. First of all, the family was very happy to learn that he had won a citation, Third Class. Secondly, everyone at home was well: his sister had got good marks at school and his father had been elected a model among the dependents of Volunteers and had been to Chungking for a meeting. Thirdly, the family was going to work even harder in order to welcome his victorious return. I read the letter over twice. Then I glanced at the envelope and saw the writer's address clearly written on it.

"Comrade, won't you write to his father?" said Chen. Perhaps he only said it in passing, but his words kept ringing in my ears.

That night, sitting in my bunker, I remembered what I had promised Huang Wen-yuan. I remembered too that the day before his death he had regretted not having given me his home address. Sitting on the *kang*, I took out my pen and wrote a letter to his father. Very simply, I told him of what I had seen here, to make him understand that to us his son was not dead.

Once I had started I could not put my pen down. I kept thinking of Huang Wen-yuan. I was thoroughly stirred and I felt under a compulsion to express all that was in my heart. So I started on the story the division commander had asked me to write. I wrote all night. The booming of enemy artillery sounded on and off throughout the night, and all that time my pen never left the paper. When dawn came I had finished. I had used so many words only to tell one truth: Comrade Huang Wen-yuan who gave all he had for our country will never die.

Tang Stories



JEN THE FOX FAIRY

Sheng Chi-tai

There was a young lord named Wei Yin who was the ninth son of the family, and grandson of the Prince of Hsinan. He was a spendthrift and a heavy drinker. His uncle had a son-in-law named Cheng, who was the sixth child of the family, but whose personal name is not known. This Cheng had studied the military arts, and was also fond of drinking and women. Since he was poor and had no home of his own, he lived with his wife's family. Cheng and Wei became great friends, and were always together. In the sixth month of the ninth year of the Tien Pao period (A.D. 750), they were walking together through the capital on their way to a drinking party at the Hsinchang quarter,* when Cheng, who had some private business, left Wei south of the Hsuanping quarter, saying he would join him later at the feast. Then Wei headed east on his white horse, while Cheng rode south on his donkey through the north gate of the Shengping quarter.

On the road Cheng came upon three girls, one of whom, dressed in a white gown, was very beautiful. Pleasantly surprised, Cheng whipped up his donkey to circle round them, wanting to accost them but lacking the courage. The girl in white kept glancing at him in what seemed an encouraging way, so Cheng asked jokingly:

"Why should such beautiful girls go on foot?"

The girl in white smiled and said: "If people with mounts aren't polite enough to offer us a lift, what else can we do?"

"My poor donkey is not good enough for such beautiful girls as you," said Cheng. "But I shall offer it now, and I shall be glad to follow you on foot."

He and the girl in white looked at each other and laughed, and with her two maids teasing them, they were soon on familiar terms. Cheng accompanied these girls eastward to Loyu Park, and by the time they got there it was already dark. They came to a magnificent house with thick walls and a big gate. As the girl in white went through the gate,

* The Tang capital, Changan, was divided into a number of quarters. Each quarter had its own wall and gates.



KU HUNG-CHUNG: An Evening Party (1)

she looked back and said, "Wait a little." One of her maids stayed at the gate, and asked him his name. Cheng told her, then asked the name of the girl, and learned that her name was Jen, and she was the twentieth child in the family.

Presently Cheng was invited in. He had just tethered his donkey at the gate and placed his hat on the saddle, when a woman of about thirty came to greet him—she was the girl's sister. Candles were set out and the table spread. After they had drunk several cups of wine the girl, who had changed her dress, reappeared. Then they drank a great deal and were very merry, and late at night they went to bed together. Her coquetry and charm, the way she sang and laughed and moved—it was all exquisite and quite out of this world. When it was nearly dawn, Jen said, "You had better go now. My brother is a member of the college of royal musicians and serves in the royal guards. He comes home at dawn and he mustn't see you." Having arranged to come again, Cheng left.

When he reached the end of the street, the gate of that quarter was still bolted; but there was a foreign bread shop there where a light was burning, and the stove had been lit. Sitting under the awning, waiting for the morning drum, Cheng began chatting with the shopkeeper. Pointing to where he had spent the night, he asked, "When you turn east from here you come to a big gate—whose house is that?"

"It's all in ruins," said the shopkeeper. "There's no house there."

"But I was there," insisted Cheng. "How can you say there is no house?"

The shopkeeper suddenly realized what had happened. "Ah, now I understand!" he exclaimed. "There's a fox fairy there, which often tempts men to spend the night with her. She has been seen three times. So you met her too, did you?"

Ashamed to admit the truth, Cheng denied this. When it was light he looked at the place again, and found the walls and the gate still there, but only waste land and a deserted garden behind.

After he went home, Cheng saw Wei who blamed him for not joining him the previous day. Instead of telling him the truth, Cheng made some excuse. However, he was still bewitched by the fairy's beauty, and longed to see her again, unable to drive her image from his heart. About a fortnight later, in a clothes shop in the West Market, he suddenly came upon her again. Her maids were with her too. When Cheng called out to her, she tried to slip into the crowd to avoid him; but he called her name repeatedly, and pushed forward. Then, with her back to him, and her fan behind her, she demanded: "You know who I am. Why do you follow me?"

"What if I do?" asked Cheng.

"I feel ashamed to face you," she said.

"I love you so much, how could you leave me?" he protested.

"It's not that I want to leave you, but I am afraid you may hate me now."

Cheng swore that he still loved her and became more insistent in his request, whereupon the girl turned round and let fall the fan, appearing as dazzlingly beautiful as ever.

"There are many fox fairies about," she told Cheng. "It's just that you don't recognize them for what they are. You needn't think it strange."

Cheng asked her to come back to him. They talked happily, and she said, "People dislike fox fairies because they often harm men; but I am not like that. If I have not lost your favour, I would like to serve you all my life." When Cheng discussed with her where they could live, Jen said, "If you go east from here, you'll come to a house with a big tree towering above its roof. It's in a quiet district. You could rent that place to live in. The other day when I first met you south of the Hsuan-ping quarter, there was a gentleman riding on a white horse towards the east. Wasn't he your brother-in-law? There's a lot of furniture in his house you can borrow."

Now it happened that Wei's uncles were absent on official duty, and their furniture was stored away. Acting on her advice, Cheng went to Wei and asked to borrow the furniture. When asked why he needed it, he said, "I have just got a beautiful mistress, and I have rented a house. I want to borrow the furniture for her use."

Wei laughed and said, "Judging by your own looks, you must have found someone very ugly. Beauty, indeed!"

Then Wei lent him curtains, bed and bedding, and sent an intelligent servant with him to have a look at the girl. Presently the servant ran back, panting and perspiring. Wei stepped forward to ask, "Have you seen her? What does she look like?"

"Marvellous! I've never seen anyone like her!"

Wei had many relations and had seen many beautiful women in his numerous adventures; accordingly he asked whether Cheng's mistress was as beautiful as one of these.

"No comparison!" exclaimed the servant. Wei mentioned four or five other names, but still the servant answered that they were not to be compared. Wei had a cousin, the sixth daughter of the Prince of Wu, who was a peerless beauty, as lovely as a fairy. "How does she compare with the sixth daughter of the Prince of Wu?" he asked.

But again the servant declared that there was no comparison.

"Is that possible?" Wei exclaimed, clasping his hands in amazement. Then he hastily asked for water to wash his neck, put on a new cap, rouged his lips and went to call on Cheng.

It happened that Cheng was out. Going in, Wei found a young servant sweeping and a maid at the door, but no one else. He questioned the boy, who laughed and said there was no one at home. But when Wei looked through the rooms, he saw a red skirt behind a door, and going closer discovered the girl hiding there. Wei dragged her out from the dark corner, and found she was even more beautiful than he had been

told. Mad with passion, he took her in his arms to assault her, only to meet with resistance. He pressed her hard, until she said, "You shall have your way, but let me first recover my breath." However, when Wei came on again, she resisted again as before. This happened three or four times. Finally Wei held her down with all his strength, and the girl, who was exhausted and drenched with perspiration, knew she could hardly escape. Then her body became limp, and she looked heart-broken.

"Why do you look so sad?" asked Wei.

With a long sigh, she answered, "I am sorry for Cheng."

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"He's over six foot tall, but he can't protect a woman—how can he call himself a man? You are young and rich, and have many beautiful mistresses; you have seen many like me. But Cheng is a poor man, and I am the only woman he loves. How can you rob him of his only love while you have so many? Because he is poor, he has to be dependent on others. He wears your clothes, eats your food, and so he is in your power. If he could support himself, we shouldn't have come to this."

Wei was a gallant man with a sense of justice. Hearing this he desisted, composed himself and apologized. Then Cheng came back, and they exchanged cordial greetings. After that Wei looked after all their needs, and Jen often went out on foot or by carriage. Wei spent practically every day with her until they became the best of friends and very fond of each other's company. Jen was everything to him except his mistress, so Wei loved and respected her, and grudged her nothing. Even eating and drinking he could not forget her. Knowing Wei's love for her, Jen said to him one day: "I'm ashamed to accept such favours from you. I'm not good enough to deserve such kindness. Besides, I cannot betray Cheng, so I can't do as you desire. I was born in Shensi, and brought up in the capital; my family are theatre people, and all my women relatives are rich men's mistresses and concubines—they know all the courtesans of the capital. If you see some beautiful girl and cannot get her, I shall get her for you. I would like to do this to repay your kindness." Wei accepted her offer.

A dressmaker named Chang in the market place took Wei's fancy with her clear complexion and fine figure. He asked Jen if she knew her, and she answered, "She is my cousin; I can get her easily." After about ten days, she brought this woman to him. A few months later, when Wei was tired of Chang, Jen said, "Market girls are easy to get. Try to think of somebody extremely charming but hardly accessible. I shall do my best for you."

"The other day at the spring festival," said Wei, "I went to Chienfu Temple with several friends, and we saw General Tiao had brought his musicians to play in the hall. One of the musicians was a reed-organ player of about sixteen, who had two locks of hair over her ears. She was charming—quite lovely! Do you know her?"

"She's the general's favourite," answered Jen. "Her mother is my cousin. I'll see what I can do."

Wei bowed to her, and Jen promised him her help. She started becoming a frequent visitor at the general's house. After a whole month had passed, Wei urged her to make haste, and enquired what her plan was. She asked him for two bolts of silk to use as a bribe, and Wei gave them to her. Two days later, Wei was having a meal with Jen when the general sent his steward with a black horse to beg her to go to his house. Hearing the summons, Jen smiled at Wei and said, "It is done." It seemed that she had made the favourite fall ill with a disease which could not be cured by medicine. At their wits' end, the girl's mother and the general had consulted a witch doctor, and Jen had shown this witch doctor her house and bribed her to say that the sick girl must be removed there.

Accordingly the witch doctor said to the general, "The girl should not stay at home, but should go and live in that house in the southeast, in order to imbibe the life-giving influences there." The general and the girl's mother made inquiries, and found it was Jen's house, whereupon the general asked her to let the girl lodge there. At first Jen declined, saying her house was too small, and only after repeated requests did she give her consent. Then the general sent the girl in a carriage with clothing and trinkets, accompanied by her mother, to Jen's house. As soon as she arrived, she was cured. Within a few days, Jen secretly introduced Wei to her, and a month later she was with child. But then her mother took fright, and carried her back hastily to the general. That was the end of that affair.

One day Jen said to Cheng, "Can you get hold of five or six thousand coins? If you can, I shall make some profit for you."

Cheng agreed, and borrowed six thousand coins. Then Jen told him, "Go to the horse sellers in the market. You will find a horse with a spot on its rump—buy it and take it home."

Cheng went to the market and saw a man leading a horse to sell, and true enough there was a black mark on the horse's rump. Accordingly he bought it and led it home. His brothers-in-law laughed at him, saying, "This is a horse nobody wants. What did you buy such a beast for?"

Soon after that, Jen told him: "The time has come to sell the horse. You should get thirty thousand for it." Then Cheng took the horse to the market. Someone offered him twenty thousand, but he refused to sell. All the people in the market marvelled: "Why does the one insist on buying at such a price? Why does the other refuse to sell?" When Cheng started to ride away, the other man followed him to the gate and raised his offer to twenty-five thousand, but still Cheng would not sell. "Nothing doing under thirty thousand," he declared. But then his brothers-in-law gathered round to pester him, and he was forced to sell at just under thirty thousand.

Later he found out the reason for the buyer's insistence: It seemed that this man was the keeper of the official horses in Chaoyin District. One of his horses, which had a black mark on its rump, had died three years ago. This fellow was to be discharged soon, and was due to be paid sixty thousand for keeping the horse. If he could buy a horse for half that sum and hand it over to the government, he would still be the gainer. Besides, he would be paid for three years' fodder which had never been consumed. That was why he had insisted on buying.

Once Jen asked Wei for some new dresses, as her old gowns were all worn out. Wei wanted to buy silk for her, but she declined, saying she preferred ready-made clothes. Wei commissioned a shopkeeper named Chang to get them, sending him to Jen to find out just what she wanted. When the shopkeeper saw her, he was astonished, and later said to Wei, "That is no common woman, she must be from some noble house. It isn't right for you to keep her. I hope you will return her to her family soon, to avoid trouble." This shows how striking her appearance was. However, they never understood why she insisted on buying ready-made dresses instead of having them made to measure.

A year later Cheng was appointed a captain of Huaili Prefecture, with his headquarters at Chincheng. Now since Cheng had a wife, though he spent the day with his mistress he had to go home to sleep at night, and he missed Jen. So when he was going to his post he asked her to accompany him. But she refused.

"We should only be together for a month or two," she said. "It seems hardly worth it. It would be better to work out how much I shall need to spend while you're away, and let me wait at home till you come back." Although Cheng pleaded with her to go with him, she was adamant. Then Cheng asked Wei for a loan, and Wei came to persuade her too, and to ask her the reason. After hesitating for some time, Jen said, "A witch told me it would be unlucky for me to go west this year. That's why I don't want to go."

But Cheng was so eager for her to go, he could think of nothing else. He and Wei both laughed, and said, "How can an intelligent girl like you be so superstitious?" They reasoned with her.

"If what the witch said was true," said Jen, "and I die because I go with you, won't you be sorry?"

"Nonsense!" declared the two men, and insisted again. Finally Jen was forced against her will to go.

Wei lent her his horse, and saw them off at Linkao. The next day they reached Mawei. Jen was riding ahead on the horse, with Cheng behind on his donkey, followed by Jen's maid and other attendants. At that time the gamekeepers outside the west gate had been training hunting dogs at Lochuan for some ten days. As Jen was passing, the dogs suddenly leapt out from the bushes, and Cheng saw Jen drop to the ground, turn into a fox and fly southwards with the dogs in hot pursuit. He ran forward and shouted at the dogs, but could not restrain them, and

after running a few hundred yards she was caught. Shedding tears, Cheng took money from his pocket to buy back the carcass, which was then buried, with a pointed stick stuck into the ground to mark the place. When he looked back, her horse was cropping grass by the roadside; her clothes were lying on the saddle while her shoes and stockings were hanging on the stirrups, like the skin shed by a cicada. Her trinkets had dropped to the ground, but everything else belonging to her had vanished, including her woman slave.

About ten days later Cheng went back to the capital. Wei was pleased to see him, and coming forward to greet him asked, "Is Jen well?"

Shedding tears, Cheng replied, "She is dead!"

Wei was stricken with grief at this news. They embraced each other, and mourned bitterly. Then Wei asked what sickness had caused her death.

"She was killed by hunting dogs," answered Cheng.

"Even fierce dogs cannot kill people," protested Wei.

"But she was no human being."

"What?" exclaimed Wei in amazement. When Cheng had told him the whole story, he marvelled, and heaved sigh after sigh. The next day they went together by carriage to Mawei, and after opening the grave to look at the carcass returned in great grief. When they thought of her former habits, the only unusual one they could recall was that she would never have her clothes made to measure.

Later Cheng became the inspector of the royal stable and a very wealthy man, keeping a stable of some dozen horses. He died at the age of sixty-five.

During the Ta Li period (A.D. 766-779), I was staying at Chungling and spent much time with Wei, who told me this story several times, until I knew it inside out. Later Wei became a chancellor of the imperial court, and concurrently Prefect of Lungchou, finally dying at his post in the northwest.

It is sad to think that a beast assuming human form should resist violation and remain chaste and faithful to her lord till death; while many women nowadays are not equal to this! And what a pity that Cheng was not more intelligent. He only appreciated her appearance, but did not study her nature. A really wise man would have probed the laws of change, investigated the nature of supernatural beings, and with his skilful pen recorded the gist of the mystery, instead of simply contenting himself with the enjoyment of her grace and charm. This is most unfortunate.

In the second year of the Chien Chung period (A.D. 781), I was going to Suchow to take up my post as Left Advisor at the same time that General Pei Chi, Junior City Magistrate Sun Cheng, Advisor of the Civil Affairs Ministry Tsui Hsu, and Right Advisor Lu Tsun were setting out to the Yangtze Valley. We travelled together from Shensi Province to Suchow by land and along the waterways. With us too was Ex-Advisor Chu

Fang, who was on a tour. We floated down the Yin and Huai Rivers in a boat, feasting during the day and talking at night, and each told of some strange happenings. When these gentlemen heard the story of Jen, they were deeply moved and greatly astonished. It was because they asked me to record this strange tale, that I have written this story.

THE DRAGON KING'S DAUGHTER

Li Chao-wei

During the Yi Feng period (A.D. 676-678), a scholar named Liu Yi took the official examination but failed. As he was returning to the Hsiang River Valley, he decided to go and say goodbye to a fellow provincial who was staying at Chinyang. He had ridden about two miles, when a bird flying up from the ground startled his horse and made it bolt. It galloped two miles before he could stop it. Then Liu saw a girl herding sheep by the roadside. She was amazingly beautiful but her finely arched eyebrows were knit, her clothes were soiled, and she was standing there listening intently, as if waiting for someone.

"What has brought you to such a sorry state?" Liu asked.

The girl first expressed her gratitude with a smile. Then, unable to restrain her tears, she replied, "Unhappy creature that I am! Since you ask me the reason, how can I hide the deep hatred I feel? Listen then: I am the youngest daughter of the dragon king of Tungting Lake. My parents married me to the second son of the dragon king of Chin River, but my husband was fond of pleasure and led astray by his attendants—he treated me worse and worse every day. I complained to my husband's parents, but they were too fond of their son to take my part. When I persisted in complaining, they were offended, and banished me here." Having said this, she broke down and sobbed.

"Tungting Lake is so far away," she went on. "It lies beyond the distant horizon, and I can get no word to my family. My heart is breaking and my eyes are worn out with watching, but there is none to know my grief or pity me. Since you are going south and will be near the lake, may I trouble you to take a letter?"

"I have a sense of justice," said Liu, "and your story makes my blood boil. I only wish I had wings to fly there—why do you talk of trouble? But the lake is very deep, and I can only walk on land. How am I to convey your message? I am afraid I may not be able to get through, proving unworthy of your trust and failing in my own sincere wish to help you."

"I cannot say how I appreciate your kindness," said the girl, shedding

tears. "If ever I get a reply, I shall repay you even if it costs my life. Before you promised to help me, I dared not tell you how to reach my parents; but actually, to go to the lake is no more difficult than to go to the capital."

When Liu asked for directions, she told him, "South of the lake there is a big orange tree which is the sacred tree of the village. Take off the belt I am giving you to wear, and knock on the trunk three times. Someone will come to your call, and when you follow him, you will have no difficulty. I have opened my heart to you besides trusting you with my letter. Please tell my parents what you have heard. On no account fail me!"

Liu promised to do as she said. Then the girl took a letter from her pocket and handed it to him with a bow, all the while looking eastwards and weeping, so that Liu was deeply moved.

When he had put the letter in his wallet, he said, "May I ask why you herd sheep? Do deities also eat cattle?"

"No," answered the girl. "These are not sheep, but rain-bringers."

"What are they?"

"Thunder, lightning, and the like."

Liu looked at the sheep closely, and saw that they moved proudly with heads held high. They nibbled the grass differently too, although they were the same size as ordinary sheep and had the same wool and horns.

"Now that I am going to act as your messenger," said Liu, "I hope in future, when you get back to the lake, you won't refuse to see me."

"Certainly not," exclaimed the girl. "I shall treat you as a dear relative."

Then they bid each other goodbye, and he started east. After a few dozen yards he looked back, but both the girl and the sheep had disappeared.

That evening he reached the district town and said goodbye to his friend. It took him over a month to get home, and he went at once to Tungting Lake. He found the orange tree south of the lake, changed his belt, faced the tree and knocked three times. A warrior came out of the water, bowed to him and asked, "Why have you come here, honourable sir?"

Without telling him the story, Liu simply answered, "To see your king."

The warrior parted the waves and pointed the way, saying to Liu as he led him down, "Close your eyes. We will be there in no time."

Liu did as he was told, and soon they reached a great palace where he saw clustered towers and pavilions, millions of gates and arches, and all the rare plants and trees of the world. The warrior asked him to wait at the corner of a great hall.

"What place is this?" asked Liu.

"The Palace of the Divine Void."

Looking round, Liu saw that this palace was filled with all the precious objects known to men. The pillars were of white jade with bases of jasper; the couches were of coral, the screens of crystal. The emerald lintels were set with cut glass, while the rainbow-coloured beams were inlaid with amber. And the whole created an impression of strange beauty and unfathomable depth which defied description.

The dragon king was a long time in coming, and Liu asked the warrior, "Where is the Lord of Tungting?"

"His Majesty is in the Dark Pearl Pavilion," was the reply. "He is discussing the Fire Canon with the Sun Priest. They will soon have finished."

"What is the Fire Canon?" asked Liu.

"Our king is a dragon," replied the warrior, "so water is his element, and with one drop of water he can flood mountains and valleys. The priest is a man, so fire is his element, and with one torch he can burn a whole palace. Since the properties of the elements are different, they have different effects. As the Sun Priest is expert in the laws of men, our king has asked him for a talk."

He had just finished speaking, when the palace gate opened, a mist seemed to gather, and a man in purple holding a jasper sceptre appeared. The warrior leapt to attention, saying, "This is our king." Then he went forward to report Liu's arrival.

The dragon king looked at Liu and asked, "Are you not of the world of men?"

Liu replied that he was, and bowed. The king greeted him in return and asked him to be seated.

"Our watery kingdom is dark and deep," said the dragon king. "And we are ignorant people. What has brought you, sir, from such a distance?"

"I am of the same district as Your Majesty," said Liu. "I was born in the south, but have studied in the northwest. Not long ago, after failing in the examination, I was riding by Chin River when I came upon your daughter herding sheep in the open country. Exposed to wind and rain, she was a pitiful sight to see. When I questioned her, she told me she had come to such a pass because of her husband's unkindness and his parents' neglect. Her tears as she spoke really went to my heart. Then she entrusted this letter to me and I promised to deliver it. That is why I am here." He took out the letter and gave it to the king.

After reading the letter, the king covered up his face and wept. "Though I am her old father," he said, "I have been like a man blind and deaf, unaware that my child was suffering far away, while you, a stranger, came to her rescue. As long as I live, I shall never forget your kindness." He wept for some time, and all the attendants shed tears.

Presently a palace eunuch came to the king, and the king gave him the letter, ordering him to tell the women in the inner palace. Then cry-

ing was heard in the inner palace. Alarmed, the king ordered his attendants, "Quickly tell the women not to make so much noise, for fear the Prince of Chientang hear them."

"Who is the prince?" asked Liu.

"My younger brother," said the dragon king. "He used to be the Prince of Chientang River, but has now retired."

"Why do you have to keep it from him?"

"Because he is overbold," said the king. "The nine years of flood in the time of the ancient sage king Yao was due to one of his rages. Recently he quarrelled with the angels in heaven and flooded the five mountains. Because of a few good deeds I had to my credit, the heavenly king pardoned my brother. But he has to be kept here. The people of Chientang are still waiting for his return."

He had scarcely finished speaking when there was a great crash. It seemed as if heaven and earth must have been torn asunder. The palace shook and mist seethed as a crimson dragon more than a thousand feet long burst in, dragging along a jade pillar to which it had been fastened by a gold chain round its neck. Its eyes were bright as lightning, its tongue as red as blood, and it had scarlet scales and a fiery mane. Thunder crashed and lightning flashed around it, followed by a sudden storm of snow and hailstones, and then it soared up into the azure sky.

Panic-stricken, Liu had fallen to the ground. But now the king himself helped him up, saying, "Have no fear. All is well."

After a long time, Liu recovered a little, and when he was calm enough he asked permission to leave, saying, "I had better leave while I can. I couldn't survive another experience like that."

"There's no need to leave," said the king. "That's the way my brother goes, but he won't come back that way. Do stay a little longer." He ordered drinks to be served, and they drank to pledge their friendship.

Then a soft breeze sprang up, wafting over auspicious clouds. Amid flying pennons and flags and the sound of flutes and pipes, thousands of brightly dressed girls came in, laughing and chattering. Among them was one girl with beautiful, arched eyebrows, bedecked with bright jewels and dressed in the finest gauze. When she drew near, Liu saw that she was the girl who had given him the message. Now she was shedding tears of joy, as she moved through a fragrant red and purple mist to the inner palace.

The king laughed, and said to Liu, "Here comes the prisoner from Chin River." He excused himself and went inside, and from the inner palace happy weeping was heard. Then the king came out again and feasted with Liu.

Presently a man in purple came up and stood by the king. He was holding a jasper sceptre, and looked vigorous and full of spirit. The king introduced him, saying, "This is the Prince of Chientang."

Liu stood up to bow to him, and the prince bowed in return, and said, "My unhappy niece was insulted by that young blackguard. It was

good of you, sir, with your strong sense of justice, to carry the news of her wrongs so far. If not for you, she would have pined away by Chin River. No words can express our gratitude."

Liu bowed and thanked him. Then the prince told his brother, "I reached the river in one hour, fought there for another hour, and took another hour to come back. On my return journey I flew to high heaven to report to the heavenly king, and when he knew the injustice that had been done he pardoned my fault. In fact, he pardoned my past faults too. But I am thoroughly ashamed that in my indignation I did not stop to say goodbye, upsetting the whole palace and alarming our honourable guest." He bowed again.

"How many did you kill?" asked the king.

"Six hundred thousand."

"Did you destroy any fields?"

"About three hundred miles."

"Where is that scoundrel, her husband?"

"I ate him."

The king looked pained.

"Of course that young blackguard was insufferable," he said. "Still, that was going rather far. It is lucky that the heavenly king is omniscient and pardoned you because such a great injustice had been done. Otherwise what could I have said to defend you? Don't ever do that again." The prince bowed once more.

That evening Liu was lodged in the Hall of Frozen Light, and the next day another feast was given at the Emerald Palace. All the royal family gathered there, music was played, and wine and delicacies were served. Then bugles, horns and drums sounded as ten thousand warriors danced with flags, swords and halberds on the left-hand side, while one came forward to announce that this was the triumphal march of the Prince of Chientang. The display of arms was spectacular and awe-inspiring, and impressed all who saw it.

Then to an accompaniment of gongs and cymbals, stringed and bamboo instruments, a thousand girls dressed in bright silks and decked with jewels danced on the right-hand side, while one came forward to announce that this music was to celebrate the return of the princess. The melodies were poignant and sweet, and breathed grief and longing, so that all who heard were moved to tears. When the two dances were over, the dragon king in high good humour made the dancers presents of silk. Then the guests sat down together to feast, and drank wine to their hearts' content.

When they had drunk their fill, the king rapped on the table, and sang:

*Wide the earth and grey the sky,
Who can hear a distant cry?
The fox lies snugly in his lair,
But thunderbolts can reach him there.
A true man, who upholds the right,*

*Restored my daughter to my sight.
Such service how can we requite?*

After the king had finished singing, the prince bowed, and sang:

*Life and death are fixed by fate,
Our princess found a worthless mate.
By River Chin she had to go,
In wind and frost, in rain and snow.
This gentleman her letter bore,
Then we restored her to this shore.
This we'll remember evermore!*

After this song, the king and prince stood up and each presented a cup to Liu. Liu hesitated for a second, then accepted them, quaffed off the wine and after returning the cups sang:

*Like a flower in the rain,
The princess longed for home in vain.
I brought back tidings of her plight,
And all her wrongs were soon set right.
Now we feast, but soon must part,
Bitter longing fills my heart.*

As he finished singing, they all cheered.

The king brought out a jasper box containing rhinoceros horn which could cause the waves to open up, and the prince brought out an amber plate on which was jade that shone at night. They presented these to Liu, and he thanked them and accepted the gifts. Then the inmates of the palace started piling silk and jewels beside him, until gorgeous materials were heaped up all around him. Liu laughed and chatted with them all, and had not a moment's quiet. When he had had enough wine and pleasure, he excused himself, and went back to sleep in the Hall of Frozen Light.

The day after, he was feasted again in the Pavilion of Limpid Light. The Prince of Chientang, heated with wine and lounging on the couch, said insolently to Liu, "A hard rock can be smashed but not made to yield, and a gallant man can be killed but not put to shame. There is something I would like to suggest to you. If you agree, then all will be well between us. If not, we can perish together. How about it?"

"Let me hear what it is," said Liu.

"You know the king's daughter was the wife of the Lord of Chin River," said the prince. "She is an excellent girl with a fine character, and is well thought of by all her relatives. She was unfortunate enough to suffer indignities at the hands of that blackguard, but that is over now. We would like to entrust her to you, and become your relatives for ever."

Then she who owes you gratitude will belong to you, and we who love her will know she is in good hands. A generous man shouldn't do things by halves. Don't you agree?"

For a moment Liu looked grave. Then he laughed, and said, "I never thought the Prince of Chientang would have such unworthy ideas. I have heard that once when you crossed the nine continents, you shook the five mountains to vent your anger; and I have seen you break the golden chain and drag the jade pillar after you to rescue your niece. I thought there was no one as brave and just as you, who dared risk death to right a wrong, and would sacrifice your life for those you love. These are the true marks of greatness. Yet now, while music is being played and host and guest are in harmony, you try to force me to do your will in defiance of honour. I would never have expected this of you. If I met you on the angry sea or among dark mountains, with your fins and beard flying and mist and rain all around, though you threatened me with death, I should consider you a mere beast. I would not count it against you. But now you are in human garb. You talk of manners and show a deep understanding of human relationships and the ways of men. You can behave better than many gallants in the world of men, not to say monsters of the waters. Yet you try to take advantage of your strength and temper—under the pretence that you are drunk—to force me to agree to your proposal. This is hardly right. Of course, I am small enough to hide under one of your scales, but I dare risk your anger. I hope you will reconsider your proposal."

Then the prince apologized. "I was brought up in the palace and was never taught etiquette," he said. "Just now I spoke wildly and offended you—I deserve to be reprimanded. Don't let this spoil our friendship." That night they feasted together again as merrily as ever, and Liu and the prince became great friends.

The day after, Liu asked permission to leave. The queen gave another feast for him in the Hall of Hidden Light and shedding tears said to him, "My daughter owes you so much, we can never repay you. And we are sorry to have to say goodbye." She told the princess to thank Liu.

"Shall we ever meet again?" asked the queen.

Liu regretted now that he had not agreed to the prince's request, and was very sad. After the feast, when he bid them farewell, the whole palace was filled with sighing, and innumerable rare jewels were given him as parting gifts.

Liu left the lake by the way he had come, escorted by some dozen attendants who carried his bags to his home, then left him. He went to a jeweller's at Kuanglin to sell some of the jewels, and though he sold only about one hundredth of all he had, he became a multi-millionaire, wealthier by far than all the rich men west of Huai River.

He married a girl called Chang, but soon she died. Then he married a girl called Han, but after several months she died too; and he moved to Chinlin.

Lonely, he wanted to take another wife, and a go-between told him, "There is a girl called Lu from Fanyang County, whose father, Lu Hao, used to be magistrate of Chingliu. In his later years he studied Taoist philosophy and lived by himself in the wilderness, so that now no one knows where he is. Her mother was named Cheng. The year before last the girl was married into the Chang family at Chingho, but unfortunately the husband died. Because she is so young, and intelligent and good-looking too, her mother wants to find a good husband for her. Are you interested?"

Liu then married this girl on an auspicious day. Since both families were wealthy, they had magnificent gifts and equipage, and all the people of Chinlin were impressed.

A month after their marriage, when Liu came home one evening, it struck him that his wife looked very much like the dragon king's daughter, except that she was in better health and more beautiful. Accordingly, he told her what had happened. But his wife said, "I can't believe it."

Then she told him that she was with child, and Liu became even more fond of her.

A month after the child was born, Liu's wife dressed herself in fine clothes and put on her jewels, and invited all their relatives to the house. Before the assembled company she asked him with a smile, "Don't you remember meeting me before?"

"Once I carried a message for the dragon king's daughter," said Liu. "That is something I have never forgotten."

"I am the dragon king's daughter," she said. "Wronged by my former husband, I was rescued by you, and I swore to repay your kindness. When my uncle the prince suggested that we marry, and you refused, I fell ill from disappointment. After our separation we lived in two different spheres, and I had no way of sending word to you. Later my parents wanted to marry me to another river god—that stripling of Choching River—but I remained true to you. Although you had forsaken me and there was no hope of seeing you again, I would rather die than stop loving you. Soon after that, my parents took pity on me and decided to ask you again; but you married girls from the Chang and Han families, and there was nothing we could do. After those girls had died and you came to live here, my parents felt the match was possible. But I never dared hope that one day I might become your wife. I shall be grateful and happy all my life, and die without regret." Then she wept.

Presently she went on: "I did not tell you before who I was, because I knew you did not care for my looks. But I can tell you now because I know you are fond of me. I am not good enough to keep your love, so I rely on your fondness for the child to hold you. I am anxious to know your feelings. Please tell me, to set my mind at ease. When you took my letter, you smiled at me and said, 'When you go back to the lake, don't refuse to see me!' Did you want us to become husband and wife in

future? Later when my uncle proposed the marriage, and you refused him, did you really mean it, or were you just offended? Do tell me."

"It must all have been fated," said Liu. "When first I met you by the river, you looked so wronged and pale, I was very sorry for you. But I think at that time I only wanted to pass on the news and set the wrong right. When I said I hoped you wouldn't refuse to see me in future, it was just a casual remark with nothing behind it. When the prince tried to force me into marriage, I felt he was bullying me, and became angry. I had acted out of a sense of justice, so how could I marry the woman whose husband's death I had caused? Besides, I have always been a man of integrity—how could I act against my conscience? So during our drinking I was speaking from my heart, saying only what was just, and I was not afraid of him. When the time came to leave, however, and I saw your lingering look, I rather regretted what I had said. But after I left the lake, kept busy by worldly affairs, I could not convey to you my love and gratitude. Well, now that you belong to the Lu family, and are a woman, I find my former feelings towards you were more than a fleeting passion after all! From now on, I shall love you always."

His wife was deeply moved, and after shedding tears she said, "Don't think only human beings know gratitude. I shall repay your kindness. A dragon lives for ten thousand years, and I shall share my span of life with you. We shall travel freely by land and sea. You can trust me."

"I never thought you would give me a new lease of life," laughed Liu.

They went to the lake again, where they were once more royally entertained. But of this there is no need to speak.

Later they lived at Nanhai for forty years. Their mansions, equipage, feasts and clothes were as splendid as a prince's, and Liu was able to help all his relatives. His perennial youth amazed people. During the Kai Yuan period (A.D. 713-741), when the emperor became interested in the secret of long life and searched far and wide for alchemists, Liu was given no peace; accordingly he went back with his wife to the lake. Thus he disappeared from the world for more than ten years. At the end of that period, Liu's younger cousin, Hsueh Ku, lost his post as magistrate of the capital and was sent to the southeast. On his journey Hsueh crossed Tungting Lake. It was a clear day and he was looking into the distance when he saw a green mountain emerging from the distant waves. The boatman shrank back in fear, saying, "There was never any mountain here—it must be a sea monster!"

As they were watching the mountain approach, a painted barge came swiftly toward them and the men on it called Hsueh's name. One of them told him, "Mr. Liu sends his greetings." Then Hsueh understood. Invited to the foot of the mountain, he picked up the skirt of his gown and went quickly ashore. On the mountain were palaces like those on earth, and Liu was standing there with musicians before him and jewel-decked girls behind, more splendid than in the world of men. Talking

more brilliantly and looking even younger than before, he greeted Hsueh at the steps and took his hand.

"We have not been separated long," he said, "yet your hair is turning grey."

"You are fated to become an immortal, and I to become dry bones," retorted Hsueh with a laugh.

Liu gave Hsueh fifty capsules, and said, "Each of these capsules will give you an extra year of life. When you have finished them, come again. Don't stay too long in the world of men, where you must suffer so many hardships." They feasted happily, and then Hsueh left. Liu was never seen again, but Hsueh often told people this story. And forty years later, Hsueh too vanished from the world.

STORY OF A SINGSONG GIRL

Pai Hsing-chien

In the Tien Pao period (A.D. 742-756) the Lord of Jungyang, whose name and surname I will omit, was Governor of Changchou. He was highly respected and kept a great retinue. When our story starts he was fifty, and had a son of nearly twenty—an intelligent lad of outstanding literary ability, who was the admiration of all his contemporaries. His father loved him dearly and had high hopes of him. "This," he would say, "is the 'thousand league colt' of our family." When the time came for the lad to take the provincial examination, his father gave him fine clothes and equipage for the journey, and money for his expenses in the capital. "With your gifts you should succeed at the first attempt," he said. "But I am giving you an allowance for two years, and a generous one at that, so that you can work without worrying." The young man was quite confident too, and saw himself passing the examination as clearly as he saw the palm of his own hand.

Setting out from Piling he reached the capital in little more than a month and took a house in the Pucheng quarter. One day on his way back from the Eastern Market, he entered the eastern gate of the Ping-kang quarter to visit a friend who lived in the southwest part of the quarter. When he reached Mingko Lane, he saw a house with a rather narrow gate and courtyard. The house itself, however, was a grand one, and from the gate you could see many buildings stretching back. One half of the double door was open, and at it stood a girl, attended by her young maid. She was of an exquisite, bewitching beauty, such as the world has seldom seen.

When he saw her, the young man unconsciously reined in his horse and hesitated, unable to tear himself away. He deliberately dropped his whip and waited for his servant to pick it up, all the time staring at the girl. She, for her part, returned his gaze with a look of answering admiration. But in the end he went away without daring to speak to her.

After that he was like a man distracted, and secretly begged a friend who knew the capital well to find out who she was.

"The house belongs to a courtesan named Li," his friend told him.

"Is it possible to get her?" he asked.

"She is very well off," said his friend, "because her previous dealings have been with rich and aristocratic families, who paid her lavishly. Unless you spend a million cash, she will have nothing to do with you."

"All I want is to win her," answered the young man. "I don't mind if she costs a million."

The next day he put on his best clothes and set out, with a train of attendants behind him, for her house. When he knocked at the door, a young maid opened it.

"Can you tell me whose house this is?" the young man asked.

The maid did not answer, but ran back into the house calling out at the top of her voice: "Here's the gentleman who dropped his whip the other day!"

The girl replied with evident pleasure: "Make him stay. I'll come as soon as I've changed my clothes and tidied myself."

The young man hearing this was inwardly overjoyed, as he followed the maid into the house. He saw the girl's mother—a grey-haired woman with a bent back—and bowing low said to her: "I hear that you have a vacant courtyard, which you might be willing to let. Is that true?"

"I am afraid it is too shabby and small for a gentleman like you," she said, "you may take it if you like, but I wouldn't dare ask for any rent." She then took him into the reception room, which was a very splendid one, and asked him to be seated, saying: "I have a daughter who is very young and has few accomplishments, but who enjoys the company of visitors. I should like you to meet her."

So saying, she called for her daughter. The girl had such sparkling eyes and dazzling white arms, and moved with such consummate grace, that the young man could only leap to his feet in confusion and did not dare raise his eyes. When they had greeted each other, he made a few remarks about the weather, conscious as he did so that her beauty was such as he had never seen before.

They sat down again. Tea was made and wine poured out. The vessels used were spotlessly clean. He stayed on until it was late and the curfew drum could be heard all around, when the old lady asked if he lived far away.

He answered untruthfully: "Several miles beyond Yenping Gate,*" hoping that they would ask him to stay.

* Yenping Gate was on the west side of the city, while the girl lived in the east.

"The drum has sounded," she said. "You will have to leave at once, if you don't want to break the law."

"I was enjoying myself so much," said the young man, "that I didn't notice how late it was. My house is a long way off, and I have no relations in the city. What am I to do?"

"If you don't think our house too shabby," said the girl, "what harm would there be in your spending the night here?"

He glanced several times at the old lady, and she assented.

Calling his servants, he ordered them to bring two bolts of silk* which he offered for the expenses of a feast. But the girl laughingly stopped him, saying: "No, you are our guest. We would like to entertain you with our humble household's rough and ready fare to-night. You can treat us another time." He tried to refuse, but in the end she had her way, and they all moved to the western hall. The curtains, screens, blinds and couches were of dazzling splendour; while the toilet-boxes, coverlets, and pillows were most luxurious. Candles were lighted and an excellent supper was served.

After supper the old lady retired. Then the young man and the girl began to talk intimately, laughing and joking completely at their ease.

"I passed your house the other day," said the young man, "and you happened to be standing at the door. And after that, I couldn't get you out of my head. Lying down to rest or sitting down to eat, I could not stop thinking of you."

"It was just the same with me," she answered.

"You know, I didn't come to-day simply to look for lodgings," he said. "I came hoping you would grant the wish of my life; but I wasn't sure what my fate would be. . . ."

He had not finished speaking when the old woman came back and asked what they were saying. When they told her, she laughed and said: "There is a natural attraction between the sexes.* When lovers are agreed, not even their parents can control them. But my daughter is of humble birth—are you sure she is fit to share your bed?"

The young man immediately came down from the dais and, bowing low, said: "Please accept me as your servant." After that the old lady regarded him as her son-in-law; they drank heavily together and finally parted. Next morning he had all his baggage brought round to their house and made it his home.

Henceforward he shut himself up there, and his friends heard no more of him. He mixed only with actors, dancers and low people of that kind, passing the time in wild sports and aimless feasting. When all his money was spent, he sold his horses and discharged his menservants. In little over a year his money, property, attendants and horses were all gone.

* In the Tang dynasty silk was often used as money.

The old lady had begun to treat him coldly, but the girl seemed to be more devoted to him than ever. One day she said to him: "We have been together a year, but I am still not with child. They say that the spirit of the Bamboo Grove answers prayers as surely as an echo. Shall we go to his temple and offer a libation?"

Not suspecting any plot, the young man was delighted. And having pawned his coat to buy wine and sacrificial meat, he went with her to the temple and prayed to the spirit. They spent two nights there and started back the third day, the young man riding a donkey behind the girl's carriage. When they reached the north gate of the Hsuanyang quarter, she turned to him and said: "My aunt's house is in a lane to the east near here. Suppose we rest there for a little?"

He fell in with her wishes, and they had not gone more than a hundred paces when he saw a wide drive and their servant stopped the carriage, saying: "We have arrived." The young man got down and was met by someone who came out and asked who they were. When told that it was Miss Li, he went back and announced her. Presently a married woman came out who seemed to be about forty.

She greeted him, and asked: "Has my niece arrived?" The girl then got out of the cart and her aunt welcomed her, and said: "Why have you not been here for so long?" They exchanged glances and laughed. Then the girl introduced him to her aunt, after which they all went into a side garden near the western gate. There was a pavilion set in a profusion of bamboos and trees amid quiet pools and summer-houses.

"Does this garden belong to your aunt?" he asked.

She laughed, but did not answer and spoke of something else.

Delicious tea and cakes were served. But almost at once a man galloped up on a Fergana horse which was all in a lather. "The old lady has been taken very ill," he gasped. "She is beginning to be delirious. You had better hurry back."

"I am so worried," said the girl to her aunt. "Let me take the horse and ride on ahead. Then I will send it back, and you and my husband can come along later." The young man was anxious to go with her, but the aunt whispered to her maid and told her to stop him at the gate. "My sister must be dead by now," said the aunt. "You and I ought to discuss the funeral together. What good can you do by running after her in an emergency like this?" So he stayed, and they discussed the funeral and mourning rites.

It grew late, but still the horse had not come back. "I wonder what can have happened?" said the aunt. "You had better hurry over to see. I will come on later."

The young man set out. When he reached the house he found the gate firmly locked and sealed. Astounded, he questioned the neighbours. "Mrs. Li only rented this house," they told him. "When her lease was up, the landlord took it back, and she moved away. She left two days ago." But when he asked her new address, they did not know it.

He thought of hurrying back to the Hsuanyang quarter to question the aunt, but it was too late for him to get there. So he pawned some of his clothes to procure himself supper and a bed. He was too angry to sleep, however, and did not once close his eyes from dusk till dawn. Early in the morning he rode on his donkey to the aunt's house, but although he knocked on the door for the time it takes for a meal, no one answered. At last, when he had shouted several times at the top of his voice, a footman walked slowly to the door. The young man immediately asked whether the aunt was at home.

"She doesn't live here," answered the footman.

"But she was here yesterday evening," the young man protested. "Why are you trying to deceive me?" Then he asked whose house it was.

"This is the residence of His Excellency Mr. Tsui. Yesterday somebody hired this courtyard to entertain a cousin who was coming from a distance, but they were gone before nightfall."

Bewildered and nearly distracted, the young man did not know what to do. So he went back to his old lodgings in the Pucheng quarter. The landlord was sorry for him and offered to feed him; but in his despair he could eat nothing, and after three days he fell seriously ill. In another fortnight he was so weak that the landlord feared he could not live, and carried him to the undertakers. As he lay there at the point of death, all the undertakers in the market pitied him and nursed him, until he gradually recovered and was able to walk with a stick.

The undertakers then hired him by the day to hold up the mourning curtains, and in this way he earned just enough to support himself. In a few months he grew quite strong again, but whenever he heard the mourners' chants he would regret that he could not change places with the dead, and would burst out sobbing and weeping, unable to restrain his tears. When he went home he would imitate their chants. Being a man of intelligence, he very soon mastered the art and became the most expert mourner in the whole capital.

It happened that the undertakers in the east and west markets at this time were rivals. The undertakers in the eastern market turned out magnificent hearses and biers—in this respect they were unrivalled—but the mourners they provided were rather poor. Hearing of our hero's skill, the chief undertaker offered him twenty thousand cash for his services; and the experts of the eastern market secretly taught the young man all the fresh tunes they knew, singing in harmony with him. This went on for several weeks, but no one knew of it. Then the two chief undertakers agreed to give an exhibition in Tienmen Street to see which was the better. The loser would forfeit 50,000 cash to cover the cost of the refreshments provided. An agreement to this effect was drawn up and duly witnessed.

Tens of thousands of people gathered to watch the competition. The chief of the quarter got wind of the proceedings and told the chief of police. The chief of police told the city magistrate. Very soon all the

citizens of the capital were hurrying to the spot and every house in the city was empty.

The exhibition started at dawn. Coaches, hearses, and all kinds of funeral trappings had been displayed for a whole morning, but still the undertakers from the western market could establish no superiority, and their chief was filled with shame. He built a platform in the south corner of the square, and a man with a long beard came forward, holding a hand-bell and attended by several assistants. He wagged his beard, raised his eyebrows, folded his arms and bowed. Then, getting onto the platform, he sang the *White Horse* dirge. Proud of his skill, he looked to right and to left as if he knew himself unrivalled. Shouts of approval were heard on every side, and he was convinced that he must be the best dirge singer of his time who could not possibly be surpassed.

Presently the chief undertaker of the eastern market built a platform in the north corner of the square, and a young man in a black cap came forward, accompanied by five or six assistants and carrying a bunch of hearse-plumes in his hand. This was our hero.

He adjusted his clothes, looked slowly up and down, then cleared his throat and began to sing with an air of diffidence. He sang the dirge *Dew on the Garlic*, and his voice rose so shrill and clear that its echoes shook the forest trees. Before he had finished the first verse, all who heard were sobbing and hiding their tears. They started jeering at the undertakers of the western market until, overcome by shame, the chief stealthily put down the money he had forfeited, and fled, to the amazement of the crowd.

Now the emperor had recently ordered the governors of outlying provinces to confer with him at the capital once a year. This was called the "Yearly Reckoning." Thus our hero's father happened to be at the capital too, and he and some of his colleagues had discarded their official robes and insignia, and slipped away to watch the contest. With them was an old servant, who was the son-in-law of the young man's foster-nurse. Recognizing our hero's accent and gait, he wanted to accost him but dared not, so he wept. Surprised, the father asked him why he was crying.

"Sir," replied the servant, "the young man who is singing reminds me of your lost son."

"My son was murdered by robbers, because I gave him too much money," said the father. "This cannot be he." So saying, he began to weep too, and went back to his lodgings.

The old servant then asked some of the undertakers: "Who was that singer? Where did he learn such skill?" They told him it was the son of such a one, and when he asked the young man's own name, that too was unfamiliar. The old servant was so much puzzled that he determined to put the matter to the test for himself. But when the young man saw him he gave a start, and tried to hide in the crowd. The servant caught

hold of his sleeve, and said: "Surely it is you!" Then they embraced and wept, and presently went back together.

But when he came to his father's lodgings, his father was angry with him, and said: "Your conduct has disgraced the family. How dare you show your face again?" So saying he took him out of the house and led him to the ground between Chuchiang and Hsinyuan. Here he stripped him naked and gave him several hundred strokes with his horse-whip, till the young man succumbed to the pain and collapsed. Then his father left, thinking he was dead.

However, the young man's singing-master had told some of his friends to keep a secret watch on him, and now they came back and told the others what had happened. They were all greatly upset, and two men were dispatched with a reed mat to bury him. When they got there they found his heart still warm, and when they had held him up for some time he started breathing again. So they carried him home between them and gave him liquid food through a reed pipe. The next morning he recovered consciousness, but for a whole month he was unable to move his hands and feet. Moreover, the sores left by the thrashing festered and gave out such a stench that his friends found him too troublesome, and one night deposited him by the roadside.

The passers-by, however, took pity on him and threw him scraps of food, so that he did not starve. After three months he was well enough to hobble about with a stick. Clad in a linen coat—which was knotted together in a hundred places, so that it looked as tattered as a quail's tail—and carrying a broken bowl in his hand, he started to beg his way through the various quarters of the city. Autumn had now turned to winter. He spent his nights in lavatories and caves and his days haunting the markets and booths.

One day when it was snowing hard, hunger and cold had driven him into the streets. His bitter cry pierced all who heard it to the heart. But the snow was so heavy that hardly a house had its outer door open.

When he reached the eastern gate of the Anyi quarter, he went north along the wall until he came to the seventh or eighth house which he found had the left half of its double door open. This was the house where the girl Li was then living, although the young man did not know it.

He stood at the door wailing persistently. And hunger and cold had made his cry so pitiful that you could scarcely bear to hear it.

The girl heard it from her room, and said to her maid: "That is my lover. I know his voice." She flew to the door and found him there, so emaciated and covered with sores that he seemed scarcely human.

"Can it be you?" she exclaimed, deeply moved. But the young man was so overcome by anger and excitement that he could not speak, but only nodded.

She threw her arms round his neck, then wrapped him in her own embroidered jacket, led him to the western chamber, and said in a choked

voice: "It is all my fault that this has happened to you." And with these words she swooned.

The old woman came hurrying over in great alarm, crying: "What is it?" When the girl told her who had come, she immediately protested: "Send him packing! What did you bring him in here for?"

But the girl dried her tears, and said earnestly: "No! This is the son of a noble house. Once he rode in grand coaches and wore fine clothes. But when he came to our house, he soon lost all he had; and then we got rid of him by a trick—we behaved like beasts. We have ruined his career and made him despised by his fellow men. For the love of father and son is implanted by Heaven; yet because of us his father hardened his heart, and tried to kill him, then abandoned him so that he was reduced to this state.

"Everyone in the land knows that it was I who reduced him to this. The Court is full of his relatives. Once the authorities come to investigate this business, we shall be ruined. And since we have deceived Heaven and injured men, no spirits will take our part. Do we want to offend the gods and bring such misfortune on ourselves?

"I have lived as your daughter for twenty years, and my earnings amount to nearly a thousand pieces of gold. You are over sixty now, and I would like to give you enough to cover your expenses for another twenty years to buy my freedom, so that I can live somewhere else with this young man. We will not go far away. I shall see to it that we are near enough to pay our respects to you both morning and evening."

The old woman saw that the girl's mind was made up, so she gave her consent. When she had paid her ransom, the girl had a hundred pieces of gold left, and with them she hired a vacant room, five doors to the north. Here she gave the young man a bath, changed his clothes, fed him first with hot gruel, which was easy to digest, and later on with cheese and milk.

In a few weeks she was giving him all the choicest delicacies of land and sea. She clothed him, too, in the finest caps, shoes and stockings she could buy. In a few months he began to put on weight, and by the end of the year his health was as good as ever.

One day the girl said to him: "Now you are strong again and have got back your nerve. Try to think how much you remember of your old literary studies."

He thought and answered: "About a quarter."

Then she ordered her carriage to be got ready, and the young man followed her on horseback. When they reached the classical bookshop at the side-gate south of the Flag Tower, she made him choose all the books he wanted, to the tune of a hundred pieces of gold. Then she packed them in the cart and drove home. She now bade him set aside all other cares, to give his whole mind to his studies. Every evening he pored over his books, with the girl at his side, and would not sleep before midnight.

If she saw that he was tired, she would advise him to write a poem or ode by way of relaxation.

In two years he had thoroughly mastered his subjects, having read all the books in the empire. "Now I can go in for the examinations," he said.

But she answered, "No, you had better revise thoroughly, to be ready for all contingencies."

After another year, she said, "Now you may go."

He passed the examination with high distinction at the first attempt, and his reputation spread through the Ministry of Ceremony. Even older men, when they read his compositions, felt the greatest respect for him and wanted to become his friends.

But the girl said: "Wait a little! Nowadays when a bachelor of arts has passed his examination, he thinks he deserves to become a high official and enjoy fame throughout the empire. But your shady past puts you at a disadvantage beside your fellow-scholars. You must sharpen your weapons, to win a second victory. Then you can rival the best scholars."

Then the young man worked harder than ever, and his reputation grew. That year there was a special examination to select scholars of outstanding talent from all parts of the empire. The young man took the paper on criticism of the government and advice to the emperor, and came out top. He was appointed Army Inspector at Chengtu. Many high government officials were now his friends.

When he was about to take up his post, the girl said to him: "Now that you have regained your proper status, I no longer feel I have injured you. Let me go back and look after the old lady till she dies. You must marry a girl from some great family, who is fit to sacrifice to your ancestors. Don't injure yourself by an imprudent marriage. Take care of yourself! Now I must leave you."

The young man burst into tears and said: "If you leave me, I shall cut my throat."

But still she insisted that they must part.

He pleaded with her even more passionately, until she said: "Very well. I will go with you across the river as far as Chienmen. Then you must send me back."

To that he consented.

In a few weeks they reached Chienmen. Before they left a proclamation had been issued announcing that the young man's father, who had been Governor of Changchou, had been appointed Governor of Chengtu and Inspector of Chienmen. Twelve days later the Governor of Chengtu reached Chienmen, and the young man sent in his card to the posting-station where he was staying. His father could not believe that this was his son, yet the card bore the names of the young man's father and grandfather, with their ranks and titles. He was astounded. Having sent for his son, he fell on his neck and wept bitterly.

"Now you are my son again," he said, and asked him to tell his story. When he had heard it he was amazed, and asked where the girl was.

"She came with me as far as here," answered the young man. "But now she is going back again."

"That won't do," said his father.

The next day he took his son in his carriage to Chengtu but kept the girl at Chienmen, finding suitable lodgings for her. The following day he ordered a go-between to arrange the wedding and prepare the six ceremonies to welcome the bride. Thus they were duly married. In the years that followed the girl proved herself a devoted wife and competent housekeeper, and was loved by all her relations.

Some years later both the young man's parents died, and he showed such filial piety in his mourning that a divine fungus appeared on the roof of his mourning-hut and the grain in that district grew three ears on each stalk. The local authorities reported this to the emperor, and informed him too that several dozen white swallows had nested in the rafters of our hero's roof. The emperor was so impressed that he immediately raised his rank.

When the three years of mourning were over, he was successively promoted to various important posts. Within ten years he was governor of several provinces, while his wife was given the title Lady of Chienkuo. They had four sons, all of whom became high officials, the least successful of them becoming Magistrate of Taiyuan. All four sons married into great families, so that all their relations were powerful and prosperous and their good fortune was unequalled.

How amazing that a singsong girl should have shown a degree of constancy rarely surpassed by the heroines of old! It really takes one's breath away.

My great-uncle was Governor of Chinchou, an official in the Ministry of Finance, and later Inspector of Roads and Waterways. The hero of this story was his predecessor in these three posts, so that he knew all the details of his adventures. One day during the Cheng Yuan period (A.D. 785-805), Li Kung-tso of Lunghsi and I happened to be talking of wives who had distinguished themselves by their integrity, and I told him the story of the Lady of Chienkuo. He listened with rapt attention, and asked me to write it down. So I took up my brush, dipped it into the ink, and jotted down this rough outline of the tale to preserve it. It was written in the eighth month of the year Yi Hai (A.D. 795), in Taiyuan.

GOVERNOR OF THE SOUTHERN TRIBUTARY STATE

Li Kung-tso

Chunyu Fung, a native of Tungping and a well-known gallant of the Yangtze River region, was fond of drinking, hot-tempered and recklessly indifferent to conventions. He had amassed great wealth and acted as patron to many dashing young men. Because of his military prowess he had been made an adjutant of the Huainan Army, but in a fit of drunkenness he offended his general and was dismissed. In his disappointment he let himself go and spent his days drinking.

His home was some three miles east of Kuanglin. South of his house there was a huge old ash tree with great branches, thick with foliage, which shaded an acre of land; and under this tree Chunyu and his boon companions drank daily to their hearts' content. In the ninth month of the seventh year of the Cheng Yuan period (A.D. 791), he got drunk, and two of his friends carried him back home and laid him in the eastern chamber. "You had better go to sleep," they said. "We shall give the horses some fodder and wash our feet. We shan't go until you feel better."

He took off his cap and rested his head on the pillow, lying there in an intoxicated state, half dreaming and half awake. Presently he saw two messengers come in, dressed in purple, who knelt before him and said, "His Majesty the king of Ashendon has sent us, his humble subjects, to invite you to his kingdom."

Chunyu got up from his couch and dressed and followed the two messengers to the gate, where he saw a small green carriage drawn by four horses. Seven or eight attendants who were standing by helped him into the carriage. They went out of the gate and set forth in the direction of the ash tree. To Chunyu's amazement, the carriage was driven down the hollow under the tree, but he dared ask no questions. The scenery along the road—the mountains and rivers, trees and plants—looked different from the world of men. The climate too had changed. After they had travelled about ten miles, city walls came into sight, and the road began to fill with carriages and people. The footmen on the carriage kept calling out to clear the road and the pedestrians moved hurriedly out of their way. They entered a great city through a turreted red gate over which was inscribed in letters of gold "The Great Kingdom of Ashendon." The gate keepers bestirred themselves and bowed low to them.

Then a rider cantered up, calling, "As His Highness the prince consort has travelled so far, His Majesty orders him to be taken to the East Hostel to rest." And he led the way.

Chunyu saw a gate in front swing open. He got down from the carriage and passed through the gate. There were brightly painted and finely carved balustrades and pilasters among terraces of blossoming trees and rare fruits, while tables and rugs, cushions and screens had been set ready in the hall and a rich feast laid out. Chunyu was enchanted. Presently it was announced that the prime minister had arrived, and Chunyu went to the foot of the hall steps to await him respectfully. Dressed in purple and holding an ivory sceptre, the minister approached, and they paid their respects to each other. This done, the minister said, "Though our land is far from yours, our king has asked you here because he hopes for an alliance with you by marriage."

"How can a humble person like myself aspire so high?" replied the young man.

The minister asked Chunyu to follow him to the palace. They walked a hundred yards and entered a red gate where spears, axes, and halberds were displayed, several hundred officers and guards had lined the way and were bowing to him, among them an old drinking friend of his named Chou. Chunyu was secretly delighted, but dared not go forward to accost him.

Then the minister led him up to a court where guards were standing solemnly in formation, showing that they were in the royal presence. He saw a tall, imposing figure on the throne, wearing a white silk robe and a bright red cap. Overcome by awe, he did not look up, but bowed as the attendants told him. "At your father's wish," said the king, "we have asked you to our unworthy kingdom, to accept our second daughter as your wife." When Chunyu kept his head bowed and dared not reply, the king told him, "You may go back to the guest house and prepare for the ceremony." As the minister accompanied him back, Chunyu was thinking hard. Since his father was a frontier general who had been reported missing, he wondered if he could have made peace with the border kingdoms, and been responsible for this invitation. He was bewildered, and at a loss to account for it.

That evening, amid pomp and splendour, the betrothal gifts of lambs, swans and silk were exchanged. There was music of stringed and bamboo instruments, feasting with lanterns and candles, and a concourse of carriages and horsemen. Among the girls present were some addressed as the nymphs of Huayang or Chinghsi, others as the fairies of the upper or lower region. Attended by a large retinue, they were dressed in green phoenix head-dresses and gold cloud-like garments and decked with golden trinkets and precious stones that dazzled the eye. These girls frolicked about and played pranks on him, with such bewitching charm and clever repartee, that Chunyu found it hard to reply.

"On the last Spring Festival," one girl said, "I went with Lady Lingchih to Chanchih Monastery to watch Yiuyuen perform the Brahmana dance in the Indian Quadrangle. I was sitting with the girls on the stone bench on the north side when you and your young gallants arrived, and

got off your horses to watch. You accosted us and teased us and made jokes—don't you remember how Chiungyin and I tied a scarlet scarf on the bamboo? Then, on the sixteenth of the seventh month, I went with Shang-cheng-tzu to Hsiaokan Monastery to listen to Monk Chih-suen discoursing on the Avalokitaśvara sutra. I donated two gold phoenix-shaped hairpins and my friend one rhinoceros horn case. You were there too, and you asked the monk to let you look at the things. After admiring them and praising the workmanship for a long time, you turned to us and said, "These pretty things and their owners surely can't belong to the world of men!" Then you asked my name and wanted to know where I lived, but I wouldn't tell you. You kept staring at me and looked quite lovelorn—don't you remember?"

Chunyu replied by quoting the song:

*Deep in my heart it is hidden,
How can I ever forget?*

And the girls said, "Who could imagine that you would become our relative?"

Just then three magnificently dressed men came up. They bowed to Chunyu and said, "By His Majesty's order we have come to be your pages." One of them looked like an old friend.

"Aren't you Tien Tze-hua of Fengyi?" Chunyu asked him. When he said that he was, Chunyu went forward to grasp his hand, and they talked about the past.

Chunyu asked him why he was there, and he replied, "On my travels I met Lord Tuan, the prime minister, and he became my patron." When Chunyu asked him if he knew Chou was also there, he replied, "Chou has done very well. He is now the city magistrate and has great influence. On several occasions he has done me a favour."

They talked cheerfully until it was announced that the prince consort should go to the wedding. As the three pages brought his sword, pendants, robes and head-dress, and helped him to put them on, Tien said, "I never thought I should be at such a grand ceremony for you today. You mustn't forget your old friends."

Several dozen fairy maids began to play some rare music, piercingly tender and infinitely sad, the like of which he had never heard before. Dozens of other attendants held candles all the way down a mile-long path lined on both sides with gold and emerald-green screens vividly painted and intricately carved. Chunyu sat up straight in the carriage, feeling rather nervous, while Tien joked to put him at his ease. The girls he had seen were arriving too in phoenix-winged carriages. When he came to the gate of Hsiu Yi Palace, the girls were there too, and Chunyu was asked to alight. They went through a ceremony just like that in the world of men, at the end of which screens and fans were removed, enabling

him to see his bride, the Princess of the Golden Bough. She was about fifteen, as lovely as a goddess, and well trained in the marriage ceremony.

After the wedding Chunyu and the princess came to love each other dearly, and his power and prestige increased daily. His equipage and entertainments were second only to the king's. One day the king took him and some other officials as his guards to hunt at the Divine Tortoise Mountain in the west, where there were high peaks, wide marshlands and luxuriant forests stocked with all kinds of birds and beasts. The hunters came back with a big bag of game that evening.

One day Chunyu said to the king, "On my wedding day Your Majesty said you had sent for me in compliance with my father's wishes. My father served formerly as a general at the frontier. After a defeat he was reported missing, and I have had no news of him for eighteen years. Since Your Majesty knows where he is now, I would like to call on him."

"Your father is still serving at the northern frontier," replied the king quickly. "We are in constant contact. You had better just write to him. There is no need for you to go there." He ordered the princess to prepare gifts to send to Chunyu's father, and after a few days a reply came in his father's handwriting. He expressed his longing for his son, and wrote just as in former letters, asking whether certain relatives were still alive and what news there was of their home-town. He said too that the distance between them was so great, it was difficult to send news. His letter was sad and full of grief. He told Chunyu not to come, but promised that they would meet in three years time. With the letter in his hands, Chunyu wept bitterly, unable to restrain himself.

One day the princess asked him, "Don't you ever want to take up an official post?"

"I am used to a carefree life," answered Chunyu. "I don't understand official work."

"Just take a post," his wife said, "and I will help you." Then she spoke to the king.

A few days later the king said, "All is not well in my southern tributary state, and the governor has been dismissed. I would like to use your talents to set their affairs in order. You might go there with my daughter." Chunyu consented, and the king ordered those in charge to get his baggage ready. Gold, jade and silk, cases and servants, carriages and horsemen formed a long baggage train when he and the princess were ready to leave. And since Chunyu had mixed with gallants as a young man, learned no trade, and never dreamed of becoming an official, he was very pleased.

He sent a memorandum to the king, saying, "As the son of a military family, I have never studied the art of government. Now that I have been given this important post, I fear I shall not only disgrace myself but ruin the prestige of the court. I would therefore like to seek far and wide for wise and talented men to help me. I have noticed that City Magistrate Chou of Yinchuan is a loyal, honest officer, who firmly upholds

the law and would make a good minister. Then there is Tien Tze-hua, a gentleman of Fengyi, who is clear-headed and sound, understands the laws of nature and has probed deeply into the principles of government. I have known both these men for ten years. I understand their talents and consider them trustworthy, and therefore I ask to have Chou appointed the chief councillor and Tien the minister of finance of my state. For then the government will be well administered and the laws well kept." The two men were then appointed ministers by the king.

The evening of Chunyu's departure, the king and queen gave a farewell feast for him south of the capital.

"The southern state is a great province," said the king. "The land is rich and the people prosperous, and you must adopt a benevolent policy there. With Chou and Tien assisting you, I hope you will do well, and come up to our expectations."

Meantime the queen told the princess, "Your husband is impetuous and fond of drinking, and he is still young. A wife should be gentle and obedient. I trust you to look after him well. Though you will not be too far from us, I shall not be seeing you every morning and evening, and I find it hard not to cry now that you are going away." Then Chunyu and the princess bowed, got into their carriage and started south. They talked cheerfully on the way, and reached their destination several days later.

The officials of the province, the monks and priests, elders, musicians, attendants and guards had all come out in welcome. The streets were thronged, and drums and bells were being sounded for miles around. Chunyu saw a goodly array of turrets and pavilions as he entered the great city gate, above which was inscribed in letters of gold "The Southern Tributary State." In front there were a red porch and open gate with a fine view into the distance. After his arrival he studied the local conditions and helped all who were sick or distressed, entrusting his government to Chou and Tien, who administered the province well. He remained governor there for twenty years, and the people benefitting from his good rule sang his praises and set up tablets extolling his virtue or built temples to him. As a result, the king honoured him even more: he was given fiefs and titles and exalted to the position of a grand councillor of state, while both Chou and Tien became well-known too as good officials, and were promoted several times. Chunyu had five sons and two daughters. His sons were given official posts reserved for the nobility, while his daughters were married into the royal family. Thus his fame and renown were unrivalled.

One year the kingdom of Sandalvine attacked this province, and the king ordered Chunyu to raise an army to defend it. He made Chou commander of thirty thousand troops to resist the invaders at Jade Tower City, but Chou was proud and reckless, and underestimated the enemy. His troops were routed and he fled back alone, leaving his armour behind, coming to the provincial capital at night. Meanwhile the invaders, after

capturing their baggage train and arms, had withdrawn. Chunyu had Chou arrested and asked to be punished, but the king pardoned them both.

That same month Chou developed a boil on his back and died. Ten days later the princess died of illness too, and Chunyu's request to leave the province and accompany the hearse to the capital was granted. Tien, the minister of finance, was appointed deputy in his place. Bowed down with grief, Chunyu followed the hearse. On the way many people wept, officers and common citizens paid their last homage, while great crowds blocked the way and clung to the carriage. When he reached Ashendon, the king and queen were waiting outside the capital, wearing mourning and weeping. The princess was posthumously entitled Shun-yi (Obedient and Graceful). Guards, awnings and musicians were provided, and she was buried at Coiling Dragon Mount some three miles east of the city. During the same month, Chou's son Yung-hsing also arrived with his father's hearse.

Now though Chunyu had been ruling over a tributary state outside the kingdom for many years, he had managed to keep on good terms with all the nobles and influential officers at court. After his return to the capital he behaved unconventionally and gathered around himself many associates and followers, his power growing so rapidly that the king began to suspect him. Then some citizens reported to the king that a mysterious portent had appeared and the state was doomed to suffer a great catastrophe: the capital would be removed and the ancestral temples destroyed. This would be caused by some one of foreign birth who was near to the royal family. After deliberation the ministers decided that there was danger in Chunyu's luxury and presumption; accordingly the king deprived him of his attendants and forbade him to have any further dealings with his associates, ordering him to live in retirement.

Conscious that he had not governed badly all these years in his province, but was now slandered, Chunyu was in low spirits. The king, sensing this, said to him, "You have been my son-in-law for more than twenty years. Unhappily my daughter died young and could not live with you till old age. This is a great misfortune." Then the queen took over the grandchildren to look after them herself, and the king said, "You have left your home for a long time. You had better go back now for a while to see your relatives. Leave your children here and do not worry about them. In three years we shall fetch you back."

"Isn't this my home?" asked Chunyu. "What other home have I to go back to?"

"You came from the world of men," replied the king with a laugh. "This is not your home." At first Chunyu felt as if he were dreaming, but then he remembered how he had come there and, shedding tears, asked for permission to return. The king ordered his attendants to see him off, and bowing he left.

The same two messengers dressed in purple accompanied him out of the gate. There he was shocked to see a shabby carriage without

attendants or envoys to go with him. He got into the carriage, however, and after driving some miles they left the city behind. They travelled the same way that he had first come by. The mountains, rivers and plains looked the same as before, but the two messengers with him were so shabby that he felt let down. He asked them when they would arrive at Kuanglin, but they went on singing without paying any attention. Only when he insisted, did they answer, "Soon."

Presently they emerged from the hollow and he saw his own village unchanged. Sadness seized him, and he could not help shedding tears. The two messengers helped him down from the carriage, through the door of his house and up the steps. Then he saw himself lying in the eastern chamber, and was so frightened that he dared not approach. At that the two messengers called his name aloud several times, and he woke up.

He saw his servants sweeping the courtyard. His two guests were still washing their feet by the couch, the slanting sun had not yet set behind the west wall and his unfinished wine was still by the east door—while he had lived through a whole generation in his dream. Deeply moved, he could not help sighing. And when he called his two friends, and told them, they were equally amazed. They went out to look for the hollow under the ash tree, and Chunyu, pointing to it, said, "This is where I went in the dream."

His friends believed this must be the work of some fox fairy or tree spirit, so servants were ordered to fetch an axe and cut through the tree trunk and branches to find where the hollow ended. It was some ten feet long, ending in a cavity into which the sun's rays shone, large enough to hold a couch. In it were mounds of earth which resembled city walls, pavilions and courts, and swarms of ants were gathered there. In the ant-hill was a small, reddish tower occupied by two huge ants, three inches long, with white wings and red heads. They were surrounded by a few dozen big ants, and other ants dared not approach them. These were the king and queen, and this was the capital of Ashendon.

Then the men followed up another hole which lay under the southern branch of the tree and was at least forty feet long. In this tunnel there was another earthen city with small towers, and many ants. This was the southern tributary state which Chunyu had governed. Another tunnel ran westwards for twenty feet. It was large and rambling and of a fantastic shape, and in it they found a rotten tortoise shell as big as a peck measure, soaked by rain and covered by luxuriant grass. This was the Divine Tortoise Mountain, where Chunyu had hunted. They followed up yet another tunnel more than ten feet long in the east, where the gnarled roots of the tree had twisted into the shape of a dragon. Here there was a small earthen mound about a foot high, and this was the grave of the princess, Chunyu's wife.

As he thought back, Chunyu was very shaken, for all that they had discovered was in accordance with his dream. He did not let his friends destroy these ant-hills, and ordered that the tunnels be covered up as before. That night, however, there was a sudden storm, and in the morning when he examined the holes the ants had gone. Thus the prophecy that Ashendon would suffer a great catastrophe and that the capital would be removed was realized. Then he thought of the invasion by the kingdom of Sandalvine, and asked his two friends to trace it. They found that some six hundred yards east of his house was a river bed long since dry, and next to it grew a big sandal tree on which vines had grown so thick that they shaded the sun. There was a small hole beside it where a swarm of ants had gathered—this must be the kingdom of Sandalvine.

If even the mysteries of ants are so unfathomable, what then of the changes caused by big beasts in the hills and woods?

At that time Chunyu's friends Chou and Tien were both in Liuho District, and he had not seen them for ten days. He sent a servant posthaste to make enquiries, and found that Chou had died of a sudden illness, while Tien was lying ill in bed. Chunyu realized how empty his dream had been, and that all was vanity too in the world of men. He therefore became a Taoist and abstained from wine and women. Three years later he died at home, in his forty-seventh year, just as predicted in the dream.

In the eighth month of the eighteenth year of the Cheng Yuan period (A.D. 802), while on a journey from Suchow to Loyang I had stopped at Huaipu and met Chunyu by chance. I questioned him and looked at the ant-hills, going into his story very thoroughly. Believing it to be quite genuine, I have written this tale for those who may be interested. Although it deals with supernatural and unorthodox things, it may have a moral for the ambitious. Let future readers not think this story a mere series of coincidences, and let them beware of taking pride in worldly fame and position.

For, as Li Chao, former adjutant general of Huachow, commented:

*His reputation reaches to the skies,
His influence can make a kingdom fall,
And yet this pomp and power, after all,
Are but an ant-heap in the wise man's eyes.*

INTRODUCING TANG STORIES

The Chinese short story developed to a high degree in the Tang dynasty (618-907), when excellently constructed tales with vivid characterisation were written. These tales were known as *Chuan Chi* (Strange Stories), and were considered a lower form of literature than the classical essays of contemporary scholars. Before the Tang dynasty, China had already produced beautiful and moving stories and legends. Judging from extant works, some of these seem to have been inseparable from ancient fables—that is to say, legends were used to explain a philosophy—while others were used by Taoists, Buddhists and other religious sects to propagate their religion. Other tales recorded good deeds or sayings, clever repartee or jokes. The well-known *Shih Shuo Hsin Yu* (New Anecdotes) is a good example of these. There were many collections of fairy tales, ghost stories and even travel accounts. All these pre-Tang stories were short and simply written—skeleton stories with little flesh on their bones. Not until the Tang dynasty do we find highly imaginative stories with detailed descriptions and realistic characterisation.

One of the earliest Tang stories is *An Old Mirror*, written by Wang Tu (c. 580-640) who lived at the end of the Sui and the beginning of the Tang dynasty. By combining several anecdotes about the magic power of old mirrors into one well-constructed story, Wang Tu improved on the simple tales of the past.

The White Monkey, by an unknown writer of the middle of the seventh century, describes a monkey with magic powers, who carried off many beautiful women but was finally killed by a general. Although a story about the supernatural, it is filled with human feeling.

More important is *The Fairies' Cavern* by Chang Chu (c. 660-740), a story of nearly ten thousand words. With a wealth of vivid detail, he describes how one night he entered a fairy cavern, and feasted and talked with the beautiful girls there. Chang Chu's use of poetic imagery and folk sayings in this story had a great influence on later writers.

After this, stories of romantic love had a great vogue. Some were tragedies of real life, others were marvellous tales which had both sad and happy endings. *The Wandering Soul*, written by Chen Hsuan-yu toward the end of the eighth century, describes the love between Wang Chou and Chang Chien-niang. When Chien-niang's father ordered her

to marry another man, Wang was heart-broken and indignant. He left by boat for the capital. But he could not sleep, and he was tossing about at midnight when he heard someone running along the bank—it was Chien-niang who had come to join him. They went to Szechuan, lived together for five years, and had two sons. Then they decided to go back to Chien-niang's old home. To their amazement, they found another Chien-niang there lying ill in bed. All of a sudden the two girls' bodies merged in one, with one set of clothes over the other; and it was clear that it was Chien-niang's wandering soul which had run away with Wang.

Jen the Fox Fairy, by Sheng Chi-tsi (c. 750-780), describes the love between a fox fairy and a young man named Cheng. It is a very vivid story. In the shape of a beautiful and charming girl, the fox shows herself loyal to her lover. Not even force can make her unfaithful to him. Later she is killed by a pack of hounds, but Cheng never forgets her.

The Dragon King's Daughter, written at the beginning of the ninth century by Li Chao-wei, records the romance between a young man and the daughter of the dragon king of Tungting Lake. It is another story of the supernatural, full of human touches and with a well-constructed plot.

Even better than these, though, are *Prince Huo's Daughter* by Chiang Fang and *Story of a Singsong Girl* by Pai Hsing-chien, both of them based on real life. They give us a truthful and vivid picture of Tang society, while their pathos and power to keep us in suspense make them two of the finest examples of Tang stories.

Chiang Fang (c. 780-830) won fame as a poet early in his career, and held many high official posts. During the Chang Ching period (821-824), he was demoted to become Governor of Tingchow. *Prince Huo's Daughter* describes the love between the famous poet Li Yi and a singsong girl called Huo Hsiao-yu. He abandoned her to make a better match, and as she waited in vain for him to come back to her the girl fell ill. On her deathbed she saw Li Yi again and reproached him, then died of a broken heart. Readers cannot but share her indignation at the poet's heartlessness.

Pai Hsing-chien's *Story of a Singsong Girl* has a happy ending. The author was the younger brother of the famous poet Pai Chu-yi, and his works were popular with common folk. He wrote this story in 795 A.D., early in his career. The heroine of the story was a famous courtesan in the capital. The hero, Cheng, squandered all that he had for love of her, then became a beggar and suffered all kinds of hardships. Later the girl took him in again and encouraged him to study hard, so that finally he passed the civil service examination and became an official. This romantic story was extremely popular in its time.

The Story of Ying-ying by Yuan Cheng (779-831) exercised a great influence on later writers, and many poems and dramas were based on

it, among them the famous opera *The Western Chamber*. Yuan Cheng was a poet who was almost as popular as his contemporary Pai Chu-yi. His poems were widely read and known even in the imperial palace, where he was considered a genius. He held important official posts, and has left over a hundred works. He was the best known of Tang short story writers. *The Story of Ying-ying* is a love story which ends in tragedy, since both the hero and heroine are forced to marry others. (The opera *The Western Chamber* substitutes a happy ending for this.) But the description of first love in this work is unforgettable.

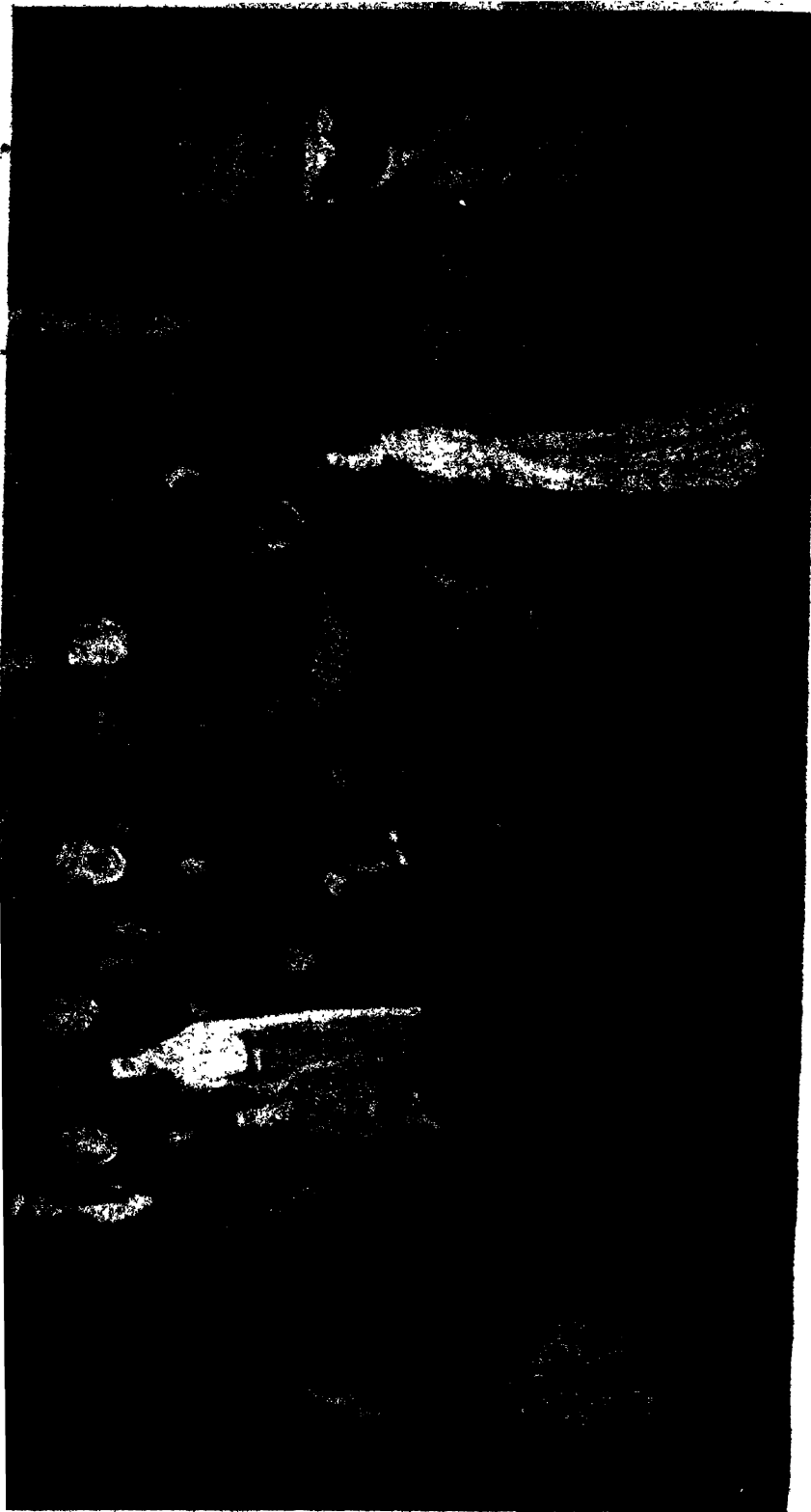
The well-known *Song of Everlasting Sorrow* was written by Chen Hung, a friend of Pai Chu-yi who had written a poem with this title to describe the love of Emperor Ming of the Tang dynasty for the Lady Yang. Chen Hung wrote this story to be appended to the poem. It had a great influence on later writers, although it is simply written and not particularly moving.

There were a great number of love stories of this nature in the Tang dynasty, but most of them were of the types mentioned above.

Tang readers also enjoyed highly imaginative escapist stories which showed how wealth and fame could vanish like a dream. The incidents in these dream tales, however, were thoroughly realistic. Such stories show the discontent and aspirations of scholars under the Tang examination system, for while they satirise the pomp and splendour of high officials and showed how often they came to a sad end, readers can detect an undercurrent of envy on the part of writers who had failed in their career. Examples of such stories are *Inside the Pillow* by Sheng Chi-tsi, *Dream of Chin* by Sheng Ya-chih and *Governor of the Southern Tributary State* by Li Kung-tso—the last of these stories being the best.

Li Kung-tso was a good friend of Pai Hsing-chien, and they both wrote excellent stories. Like Pai's *Story of a Sing-song Girl*, Li's *Governor of the Southern Tributary State* was not only famous in its day, but also exercised a great influence on later writers, especially later dramatists. These two stories are totally different in atmosphere though. Li Kung-tso as a low-ranking official must have had a hard life, and in his story we sense a passive protest, for he resorts to escapism to disguise his discontent and unhappiness. The life of Chunyu Fung in the ant heap is the life of the greatest Tang officials, and this story is a true expression of the psychology of Tang bureaucrats. *Inside the Pillow* and *Dream of Chin* have similar themes. Sheng Ya-chih (c. 790-850) was a friend of the poet Li Ho, who thought him a genius. He too was a petty official, whose works are still extant; but his *Dream of Chin* is much inferior to *Governor of the Southern Tributary State*.

In 755 A.D. An Lu-shan revolted, and the central power of the Tang empire began to decline, while local warlords grew stronger and controlled larger and larger areas. In order to consolidate their political power and extend their territory, these warlords exploited and enslaved



KU HUNG-CHUNG: An Evening Party (II)

the people. The common people were forced to pay heavy taxes in addition to paying heavy taxes, they had to serve as soldiers for the warlords who wanted to seize more land. The situation became more serious after the reign of Emperor Hsien Tsung (805-821) until it led to the great rebellion headed by Huang Chao in 875 A.D. The warlords of this period kept knights and assassins, while the suffering people hoped that superhuman champions would come forward to right their wrongs and overthrow the tyrants. This accounts for the popularity of stories about superhuman champions or swordsmen.

The Man with the Curly Beard by Tu Kuang-ting belongs to this genre, differing from other stories of this type only in its loyalty to the Tang dynasty — Tu Kuang-ting maintains that the Tang emperors ruled by divine right and must not be overthrown. But the mysterious man with the curly beard in this story is one of the swordsmen of the time. Tu Kuang-ting, who lived at the beginning of the tenth century, was a Taoist priest. He went to Szechuan during a period of civil strife, and was made a minister by the local ruler. His stories are still read today, and the theme of *The Man with the Curly Beard* was borrowed by later dramatists.

Stories and Anecdotes of Yü Yang by Tuan Cheng-shih (800?-863) contains many tales about gallants. *Red Thread*, from the anecdotes of Yuan Chiao written in the middle of the ninth century, is another good story of this type. Red Thread was a remarkably gifted girl who could travel very swiftly, and thanks to her skill as a swordswoman she succeeded in stopping a war between two rival generals. This story later enjoyed great popularity. The stories of Pei Hsin, written about the same time, are mostly of this type too, the best known being *Nieh Ying-niang* and *The Kun Lun Slave*. *The Kun Lun Slave* is simply the story of a brave man, while *Nieh Ying-niang* contains a supernatural element. The story of Nieh Ying-niang, a girl famed for her miraculous swordsmanship, was the forerunner of many tales of a similar type. Pei Hsin served as secretary to Kao Pin, Military Governor of Chinghai during the Hsien Tung period (860-873), and was later promoted to the post of Vice Governor of Chengtu and the position of Knight Advisor. Kao Pin was fond of the supernatural, and Pei Hsin might have come under his influence in this respect. But although he wrote about supernatural beings and swordsmen, his stories give us a picture of the real social conditions of those troubled times.

Tang stories are obviously a great advance upon the simple stories and legends of earlier dynasties. They give delicate and detailed descriptions of both real and imaginary situations. A Sung dynasty critic wrote: "We should study the Tang stories. Slight as they are, they possess exquisite pathos, and stand with Tang poetry as one of the glories of their age." This is a fair criticism. These stories exercised a great influence on later Chinese writers. Many story-tellers imitated their style, and they were a source of material for dramatists. Many operas

of the Yuan and the Ming dynasties, like *The Western Chamber*, *The Southern Tributary State* and *The Embroidered Coat*, borrowed the themes of Tang stories. Thus their position in the history of Chinese literature may be compared to that of the myths and legends of Greece. Chinese writers and artists cannot dispense with a good knowledge of these stories, and students of Chinese literature have to study them too, for it is impossible otherwise to understand the origin and development of the themes of many later works.

But these stories are worth reading for their own sake. Not only is their content enchanting, but they have achieved a high degree of artistic excellence.

North Shensi Sketches

Li Jo-ping

ON A NORTHWEST HIGHWAY

The Hsienyang-Sungchiachuan highway is one of the arteries of our country's northwest.

This is no ordinary road. Starting from a famous old city, it runs through nearly three hundred miles of open country to the loess steppe. It winds in and out of wooded valleys and snakes across thousands of brooks and streams, until finally it reaches Sungchiachuan on the bank of the Yellow River. This road is the trade route between Shensi and the rest of our country.

Range upon range of mountains, and stream after stream, stretch as far as the eye can see. But what really caught my eye was the people — the people coming and going along the road. Four years ago, I remembered, this road had been thronged with Mao Tse-tung's fighters — cavalymen, infantrymen and artillerymen, who raised clouds of dust as they advanced in high spirits towards Sian, towards Lanchow. Today it was hot, and our car had passed through miles of open country and was speeding toward the loess steppe. On the hill tops you could still see the remains of fortifications pitted with bullet holes. And driving down from Kuchuanliang we passed blackened thatched cottages that had been burned by the enemy and later repaired. In 1947, our troops had marched through drenching rain over the flinty ground here night after night through the pitch dark.

Our car flew forward. We could still see the battered pill-boxes, the fallen-in trenches, the defence works riddled with bullets. But all this flashed past in the twinkling of an eye.

Clouds of dust rose in front again, and rounding a corner we found the road blocked. All we could make out in the haze of dust were some great black objects rolling along. By the time our car had edged past, we saw it was a convoy of trucks loaded with timber. There were over

twenty of them, inching around the bends in the road, leaving the hillside woods covered with a thick layer of dust after they had passed. We had had big trucks like these in the past too, to transport artillery. The hillsides had been coated with dust in those days also. Only a few years ago — yet it seems another age. Things have changed completely now.

White clouds drifted across the sky, with a flock of pigeons in their wake, and covered the sun. Then the pigeons wheeled down, and disappeared into the distant mountains. The forests turned a deep green. A nip came into the air. Pheasants were calling and running in front of our car, and sparrows flew after us for a long way, as if this was a game.

"Look at those fine pigeons!" exclaimed the head of the petroleum prospecting commission.

"I'd like to see skyscrapers built on these hills!" burst out our driver Ta-hu, and stepped on the gas.

"That's a fine idea of yours!"

Ta-hu must have felt his idea was impractical, for now he amended it.

"If we moved these hills into the cities as parks, that would be pretty fine."

This proposal tickled our fancy, and a roar of laughter went up. Actually, though Ta-hu did not know it, our people really were moving mountains in their work in these deserted mountain forests. All along the road, if you kept your eyes open, you could see people—on the peaks, in the forests, in hillside hollows and in the river beds. They carried measuring tapes and hammers, and were reading compasses and climbing mountains as they searched for Shensi's mineral wealth. We had seen a bunch of students from the geology department of the Northwest University on another stretch of the road, and practically every single one had a little hammer and a notebook. Practically every single one had a rucksack on his back, filled with stones of many kinds. We had seen many, many such people along the road. They came from all parts of the country, and had come together now to do a job after their own heart. If you asked them what they were there for, they would say: "Our country has got to be rich and strong. Our people have got to have a good life!" And it struck me that Ta-hu's dream of skyscrapers built in these mountain forests, and parks (no need to move the hills to the cities), would be realized thanks to the work of people like these.

Birds had been skimming in front of our car. Suddenly they flashed past the windows and flew toward the heart of the forest. It had begun to drizzle. We had meant to get to Yen-an that day, but if it went on raining the road would become muddy and slippery, and we should be held up. I expected the commissioner and geologists to become impatient, but they went on chatting and laughing without a sign of anxiety. I realized then that of course they had no cause to worry, because wherever they stopped along the road they would find themselves at home, and find their own survey teams.

foot of the hill in front of us, a machine was rumbling. On

the upper part of its iron frame, something was rotating like a flying wheel. One of the experts told me this was a drill which was boring holes for laying charges of dynamite. Four men were standing by the drill to work it. Three of them were in oilskins, the fourth in a khaki army uniform. As this fourth man started walking to a little tent, I saw the red star sparkling on his cap. The red star seemed brighter than ever in the drizzle. The sight warmed my heart, and I fancied the star was shining over the whole highway, shining over the mountains and valleys around.

The commissioner and experts got out of the car, and started for the work site. I walked up to the man in army uniform, and he smiled at me.

"What were you in the army?" I asked.

"Squad leader," he said.

"And now?"

"I'm learning to drill."

He spoke humbly like all our fighters. But behind his modesty I could detect pride. For he went on: "We're here on Chairman Mao's orders, to help industrialize our country!"

Glancing at the three men in oilskins, I saw that two of them were also wearing army uniforms. Only the khaki colour had turned black, because the uniforms were stained with oil. The other man was wearing a workman's overalls. He was a young technician.

This was a seismological station.

Through the rain I saw groups of two and three clambering about in the hillside hollows, appearing, then disappearing from sight. On the opposite hillside a boy and a girl—students by the look of them—were discussing something. As soon as they saw us, they hurried over. But they had no sooner reached us, and greeted us, than the girl said with an exclamation of dismay to the boy: "We never looked at the seismogram that's been developed!"

The boy turned and hurried off, saying, "What! We haven't!"

By the time we went to the stream, the girl had fished out a photographic chart over a foot long. Going closer I saw it was one mass of fine curved lines, like so many crawly things, some big and some small. What could it be? The two youngsters handed it to the commissioner and experts, who started pointing at it and talking, but I could follow very little of what they said. When they had finished discussing it, the commissioner told me this was the result of blasting. This photographic chart had been taken by the seismograph.

We went to look at the seismograph. It was mounted on a truck. Unless you knew this, you would think it strange that a truck should have driven into this hollow in the hills. As we drew nearer, two girls there beckoned to us, and called: "Come on up!" They helped the commissioner onto the truck. "Come on," he said. "It's all right." So I climbed up after him. There under the tarpaulin was a gleaming black

object, which I assumed must be the seismograph. One of the girls explained the instrument to me. She had a Szechuanese accent and spoke very rapidly, scarcely even stopping for breath. As I listened I was impressed by their keenness in their work.

These youngsters' enthusiasm was contagious. They might have come by train along the Chungking-Chengt'u Railway, they might have come by boat. Today they were throwing themselves into the battle to conquer Nature. I saw a great many such youngsters on this trip, all bursting with energy, all forging ahead. In spite of the wild elements and rugged surroundings, they worked faithfully on. They had a good name for themselves. "We're the vanguard of our country's construction," they said. And an old skilled worker described them well when he told me: "Comrade, this is no easy job, it calls for hard work. Starting anything is difficult. You always need people to open up a way!"

That reminded me of something. We had driven all this way along the highway. Or, it would be more accurate to say, the highway had served as our base, for our car had left the road time and again to plunge into the valleys on either side. Once, to get to one geological team, we suddenly left that road to ford a little stream, and drove straight across, the car rocking from side to side. There was no sign of a road. Relying on a fine sense of direction, Ta-hu drove furiously forward. As his eyes swept the ground, he was surprised to discover other wheel tracks in the river bed. "Our heavy trucks have been here!" he shouted. That really shook him, because there was simply no end to the streams—as soon as you forded one, you came to another. At dusk, rain fell in the valley, and the water rose. We nevertheless drove back along the river bed. It was risky going, but we made it.

"How many streams do you think we've crossed?" the commissioner asked a young surveyor.

"Sixty, there and back," answered the youngster.

Our survey teams are constantly pushing into trackless forests. We have thousands and tens of thousands of workers like these. They are Mao Tse-tung's men. They are opening up the way for the coming age. They are opening up the road for construction, peace and socialism.

IN SEARCH OF BLACK GOLD

I set off before daylight on my recent trip to North Shensi. My first meeting with the geologist was when our car broke down on the road and Ta-hu, the driver, crawled anxiously under the car to repair it. A man jumped down from another car, and got under the car almost at the same time as Ta-hu. He lay there on his back, and he was so large he made Ta-hu look small by comparison. He had a plump, round face, tanned by the sun, and wore black-rimmed glasses. After a long time he and Ta-hu

emerged from beneath the car together. He had mud all over him, there was sweat on his face, and his hands were smeared with grease.

This was Comrade Wang Shang-wen, chief geological engineer of the geological department of the Central Petroleum Control Commission. He was a kindly, unassuming man. People found him very easy to approach, and everybody respected him. He had some impediment in his speech, but he enunciated every word distinctly; and once he started discussing any problem he expressed himself clearly and forcibly. He was always busy, always had something to do. When we travelled by water, he helped to tow the boat. Whenever our transport broke down, he either helped to find out what the trouble was, or took his little hammer and started chipping away at the stones by the roadside. He had an endless zest for living, and loved nature. Nothing appealed to him more than life in the open. Whenever he came to any place where there were rocks, he would be so busy looking round he could scarcely drag himself away.

We visited a geological team once, and our party had rounded a shoulder of the hill when we discovered Wang had disappeared. I went back to look for him, and found him blowing the dust off a stone, which he then put into his mouth. He bit it and chewed on it, as if it tasted fine. And after that—you'd be surprised—he could tell you in detail everything about that stone and its whole family history. His keen observation of all geological phenomena would amaze you. After many years' work in geology he had developed a rare integrity of character, and as soon as you knew him you would be impressed by his eminently practical qualities. Whenever he came to a place where there was a survey team, he would inspect their work carefully, and pore over the charts they had made. Then he would have a long talk with the team leader, and raise many fine points. After that he would take measurements himself and study the data. Some team leaders he encouraged warmly. Others he criticized frankly. I heard him tell more than one team: "We mustn't use expressions like 'probably,' 'perhaps' or 'approximately' in reports on our work. We must be accurate, painstaking and responsible to the people in all we do."

We were visiting Chu Ju-hsun's team now, having crossed sixty streams in one day to get there. While we were holding a meeting, we saw an old peasant leading a herd of cows and goats back from the gully, and black clouds gathered in the sky, threatening rain. We moved from under the shade of the willows to a mill shed opposite a cave. The chief of the geological commission sat by the mill. Comrade Wang climbed on top of it, holding a handful of geological specimens. The shed was packed with over twenty young geologists. Very soon it started to rain heavily and the shed was filled with the choking smell of donkey dung. But the meeting went very well. The commissioner's talk and Wang's talk made a great impression on the youngsters. I watched the way they listened with rapt attention. You could feel how keyed up they were by the new instructions they were being given and how much strength

was there hidden in their enthusiasm. The team leader, in particular, was drinking it all in with suppressed excitement, and scarcely raised his head once, so busy was he taking notes.

Chu Ju-hsun was rather a quiet lad who had only recently graduated from the university. He worked well, and was willing to use his head. No matter who asked him a question, he would not answer it at once; but his reply, when it came, was to the point. He always carried a rucksack which was slung so low that it bumped against his backside as he walked. One evening I had a long talk with him. From the expression on his long, sunburnt face and the decided way he talked, I could see that he found the geological survey work ideal. He had shown himself a thoroughly responsible team leader, and arranged the routine of the team in an orderly way.

Work in a survey team is hard. The members leave for the open country at dawn, and only come back when stars are overhead. Young Chu wanted to raise efficiency, but he was against coming back too late. So they made a rule that when the alarm clock sounded at six everybody should get up, and should be ready to set out by seven. At noon they had two hours' rest, followed by an hour and a half of political study. They got back at six in the evening. Every Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evening, they carried on studies related with their work. Friday evening was reserved for trade union or Youth League activities, or sometimes they discussed general problems that had come up. Such a life may sound dull and strenuous. Actually, in their rules time was provided for writing letters to their sweethearts and for dancing and singing parties in the open air, and they could use Saturday or Sunday evening as they pleased.

Every Saturday the village primary school children would ask: "Is there a party tonight?" Young peasants who liked to play the fiddle or the flute would join them at the weekend too. Their evening parties were very lively, and full of variety. If they had to work in the evening, they would get together to study the stars and exchange stories they had heard in their childhood. Then they would talk about the sky, tell fairy tales, or speak of the wonders of the remote past. In the still of night the sky was a deep blue, the valleys were asleep, and there was a light breeze. Those were unforgettable nights.

There was a thin, taciturn surveyor in the team we visited—a university graduate called Li Yin-fen. He had two apprentices. He worked very hard, and had a strong sense of discipline; but he was very unhappy. He seldom smiled, and never took part in games or parties. He came back late every day, and when people asked, "How goes it?" he would just give a bitter smile. Why? He was suffering because he insisted on working alone. He kept hard at it all day, yet he couldn't get through his work. Later on, the whole group discussed his problem, and told him not to do everything himself. Very soon he learnt how to teach his apprentices, so that they could share the work with him, and he worked

even more energetically. Now if people asked him, "How goes it?" he would smile, and hurry off to join the dancing.

There were university graduates like this, who were training to become geologists, in all the teams for geological surveying and geophysical prospecting. They had all been unhappy at one time or another over difficulties in their work. These youngsters didn't give in to any difficulties. Even when they were most upset, I could see their unconquerable spirit. I saw how hard they wrestled with problems and how stubbornly they struggled and forged ahead. They took pride in their work, and were bursting with energy. After overcoming depression, they worked better than ever.

One evening in Yen-an we met a young fellow with a shining red face. His name was Sung and he was leader of Team 110. He had walked fifty miles that day, crossing a mountain and fording streams on his way, in his eagerness to bring in a specimen of rock. When he produced it, it was the size of a bowl and dark in colour. It looked very ordinary, and I'd seen stones like it before. But everybody gathered round at once. Comrade Wang looked thoroughly excited as he held the stone to his nose, sniffed at it several times and examined it closely. He even got out his magnifying glass to have a better look at it. There was a broad grin on his face as he handed the stone on to a geologist called Wu. People's faces lit up, and they passed the stone from hand to hand. By the time it reached me it was warm. I sniffed at it, and it certainly was odd—it fairly reeked of petroleum. It looked better under the microscope. The stone itself was blackish-brown. But each blackish-brown grain was bright and sparkling, like a thick cluster of grapes which had congealed together. Every dent in the stone was like a bed of black pearls. It was a real jewel.

The men there looked appreciatively at the team leader who had brought this specimen, and the commissioner shook his hand hard. He told me this was a piece of oil shale. The presence of this shale proved that the oil field we had discovered could be extended over a radius of ten miles. So that stone was worth having. You can imagine how pleased and elated Team Leader Sung must have felt when he found it. No wonder he had crossed mountains and streams and travelled a whole fifty miles in one day. He was very quiet now. And I knew the sense of satisfaction he must have.

Our surveyors find happiness in their search for underground treasures. The men who look for black gold fall in love with the rocks they work on every day. And when the thick, green-black oil gushes out from the earth, and you scoop it up with your hand and see it sparkle, you gain an indescribable satisfaction—the greatest satisfaction a man can have.

In North Shensi our survey teams are welcomed wherever they go. The people of Shensi send their sons to the survey teams. The apprentices, temporary workers and cooks in most of the teams are local people.

And they are so fascinated by the survey work, they find it hard to settle down to their own jobs. They do their best to learn, hoping that before long they may become technicians or regular workers themselves. Whatever village our survey teams go to, they are sure to be surrounded by the old folk, girls and children there. The villagers ask this question and that, show a friendly concern for the team workers, and have unlimited faith in them.

"Have you found an oil field?" one asks.

"When will you drill a well?" asks another.

"Be sure you make good use of your magic mirrors that see under the mountains," says an old man. "When you've found an oil field, we shall all be better off."

Some of our surveyors were climbing a high mountain, when an old peasant hurried out of a cave, and called: "Comrades, you must be tired! Come and rest in the cave, and have something to eat before you go." The surveyors went up the mountain, but they hadn't been working long before the old man sent his grandson up to them with some sticky rice dumplings and green bean broth.

Another time, when we were walking beside a river bed, we came upon three old peasants hoeing a field. They put down their hoes, and shouted: "Comrades, find some clear spring water for us!"

"Why?"

"Our water is foul!"

"What water?"

"The goddess must wash her feet at our spring, so the water's brackish. Can't you see on that boulder over there the marks made by the goddess' feet?" They laughed.

The country folk have stopped being superstitious. They pin their hopes on our survey teams. As a matter of fact, we really wanted to find foul water where the goddess washed her feet, for it is indirect evidence of the presence of oil. And if an oil field were discovered here, the peasants would not need to worry about a supply of good drinking water!

The people's hopes spur our survey teams on. At such times our veteran geologists and our young geologists become more conscious than ever of the significance of their work. Their dreams seem to grow and expand every day. The desert must be made fruitful, the Gobi must grow green. On the loess steppe prosperous industrial cities must arise. So our survey teams press forward.

FIGHTERS FOR OIL

It was getting on for dusk. We had entered a deep valley.

There were peach, pear, apple and date trees there, as well as weeping willows. The whole valley was green with trees. The rays of the

setting sun moved across the wood, and there was a rustling of leaves, as if the trees were saying goodnight to each other. But as we crossed the wood another louder sound kept ringing in our ears. It was impossible to tell whether it came from far away in the forest or from under our feet. Looking round, I saw a group of men in a clearing in the forest, and a triangular derrick towering in the valley. I had found it. The sound came from this derrick, and was caused by the drill. It was a pleasant, metallic sound. By now it was louder and seemed to me even pleasanter than before. The earth around was trembling, and the green valley was vibrating.

Rounding a slope, I came upon some army men.

They led me along a narrow, winding path beside a little brook into another valley. When we had gone some distance and made a turn, I saw the derrick thirty to forty metres high, towering straight up into the sky. Beside it was a tool shed. There were two men on the derrick, and a dozen beneath it standing in a triangular formation to control it. The men were in overalls, but some were still wearing army caps, while others had on aluminium helmets which made them look like statues of knights of old. They were hard at work. Their laughter and shouts blended with the roar of the drilling machine into one magnificent symphony. And there was no care or anxiety on their faces, only happiness, satisfaction and smiles of confidence.

As I watched them, I felt stirred. I thought back to the time of the civil war, and the battles of Panlung, Shachiatien, Watzuchieh and Tao-shuchuang. I thought back to the days when we had no water to drink, and nothing but raw potatoes to eat. Our men had fought doggedly then, with the same confident smiles on their faces. Today, apart from the fact that they had changed their weapons and were now wielding the tools of peace, they had brought all their old courage and resourcefulness, their smiles and gaiety, to their new posts.

I visited a company which was now a drill team. All the men working on the derrick were army men. I don't know exactly how many of these drill teams there are in North Shensi, but wherever I went I saw our fighters. They were either sinking wells or pumping up oil. At the mouth of this green valley were four coal-black figures—their overalls stained completely black with oil from their work at the pumps. The fighters at one well in the Yenchang field who had just struck oil, scooped up some petroleum in their hands looking as triumphant as if they had just won a brilliant victory. In our country's petroleum industry today we not only have army men who are experienced in drilling wells, but others who can pump and refine the oil, as well as transport workers. Some are learning to become geological experts. Everybody who comes into contact with these fighters shows the warmest admiration for them. One geologist, after watching them work, threw back his head and said with a grin: "They're all right!" People may wonder, however, how fighters who have only just put down their rifles can learn so quickly

how to handle complicated machines. That was a point I was very curious about too.

That evening I put up in the valley, and paid a visit to the chief of this area. He was an armyman too—a regiment commissar—and he still behaved like a commander in the army. He let no grass grow under his feet, and everything he said was short and to the point. But his vocabulary and topics of conversation had changed. He now used specialized, technical terms like “geological point” or “structural point.” He told me that to begin with he had no technical knowledge at all, and only in this half year had he picked up a little. He must have changed very quickly. When I mentioned the army men, he said, “Our fighters have been taught by Chairman Mao. That means no difficulties can stop them. Whatever the Party gives them to do, they do. They go where the work’s hardest!”

It was very cold in North Shensi during that November when our fighters first marched into this valley. They built bridges and roads here at twenty-three degrees below zero, and turned the whole mountain valley into a great school. And in this school they started to study. It is not easy for men who are used only to handling simple guns to start learning an involved technique. Although the weather was bitterly cold, cold was something they could overcome. But when they couldn’t understand what they were taught, that made them really unhappy. There was a Party member who couldn’t grasp or remember the meaning of a certain technical term. He asked the instructor to explain it five or six times, but still couldn’t remember it. Afraid of being thought a nuisance, he didn’t ask any more, but tortured himself with a sense of exasperation. Finally, however, he got it straight. In his first two tests he got only forty marks, but in his third test he got ninety. He did so well that he was assigned to a job before he finished the training course.

There’s nothing our fighters can’t learn. If there’s something they don’t know, they ask. If there’s a problem they don’t understand, they wrestle with it. During their training course, after each class the men split into small groups. They sit under trees, on boulders, beside walls, on top of the caves. The hills are filled with men poring over books. Once, in the middle of the night, the men discovered that one fighter had pulled the electric light under his quilt, and was reviewing his lessons. Another fighter was called back by the guards from the derrick in the middle of the night. He had gone there at midnight to study the mechanism.

Because the army men are so eager to learn, they show the greatest respect and affection for their instructors. Every day before the instructors get up their rooms are swept, the braziers lit, hot water brought in and their tooth-brushes set ready beside their mugs. As soon as they get up, their quilts are folded for them and clothes that need washing are snatched away. They tried hiding their laundry under their pillows or under the bed, but it was found and taken away to be washed.

There was a mechanics instructor, a graduate from Szechuan University, whose name was Chu Tung-liang. "The men are extremely enthusiastic," he told me. "It's a privilege to be with them, and a rare experience." Realizing this, he taught very keenly and conscientiously.

As for the men, they said: "Chairman Mao has called on us to act as the vanguard of the revolution. We have to go all-out to learn new skills. It's only right that we should respect and love our instructors, because they're giving us knowledge."

It was bitterly cold in mid-winter. The ground was frozen to a depth of two or three feet, and men who came from warmer parts of the country suffered from frost-bite while they were studying here. Yet when they were learning how to drill a well, two company commanders—Party members both of them—took off their padded clothes and shoes to go down and dig the foundation. When they got to the bottom of the well, and were standing in the water, their lips turned blue with cold. "Hurry on up!" shouted their comrades. "It's somebody else's turn." But they answered, "Never mind!" and refused to come up. That is the spirit they show in learning. Now all these fighters have gone to different posts.

There was a Youth League member called Kao Wen-ho, who was well known during the training period because he got an average mark of 95.5 for all his courses. Now he is working in the inner furnace room of the drill team I visited. He seldom smiles, and speaks very dispassionately. When he described to me the great occasion on which they first struck oil, his face remained quite impassive. But when he said, "We were able to use what we'd learned!" he smiled happily, triumphantly and with confidence.

Our fighters once wielded hoes in North Shensi, when they opened up the waste land at Nanniwan which became famous all over the country. They took their guns and shed their blood to drive out Chiang Kai-shek and Hu Tsung-nan. And today in North Shensi they are wielding steel drills to create wealth for the people. They will always be in the vanguard of the revolution.

Go to North Shensi yourself, to the loess steppe, to the rugged mountain region, to the new, green villages which are springing up. There you will see our fighters, you will see innumerable new people and innumerable new things which cannot fail to stir you.

EDITORIAL NOTES

The victory of the Chinese revolution is a historic event of world significance. Many of our writers have written on the great feats of this revolutionary struggle, and Liu Ching's *Wall of Bronze*, published in this number, is one of the representative novels on this theme.

It is a story of how the people of the North Shensi revolutionary bases in the war of liberation coordinated with the fighters at the front to win victory. This work eloquently illustrates the popular character of the revolutionary war, and the vital relationship between frontline fighters and common folk in the rear which guaranteed the defeat of the reactionary enemy.

Chairman Mao has said, “. . . Comrades, what are really walls of bronze and iron? The masses, the millions upon millions of masses who sincerely and earnestly support the revolution. They really form walls of bronze and iron which no force can break down, absolutely none. The counter-revolutionary forces can never break us, but we shall break them. By rallying millions upon millions of the masses round the revolutionary government and by expanding our revolutionary war, we shall be able to wipe out any counter-revolution and free the whole of China.” Although this novel deals only with one aspect of the war of liberation, it amply illustrates the truth of Chairman Mao's words.

Liu Ching is the pen-name of Liu Yun-hua, who was born in 1916 in Wubow County of North Shensi, where the action of this novel takes place. He began to write while he was still a middle school student in Sian, and several of his short stories were published in the literary supplements of local papers. In 1935, when Peking students set afoot a nationwide movement of protest against Japanese aggression, Liu Ching helped to edit the Sian student paper *Frontline*. In 1936 he edited *Student Call*, and later became the editor of the literary supplement of the *North-west Cultural Daily*. During the liberation war he worked with the troops and helped to organise the peasants. All his stories are based on actual experience. Liu Ching is the author of another novel, *Sowing*, written after he had taken part in village work. A collection of his short stories entitled *Mine* has also been published.

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The Shop of the Lin Family, by Mao Tun, was first published in 1932. At that time the Japanese aggressors had invaded China's Northeast, and

were planning to extend their aggression to the Yangtze River valley. In the spring of 1932, they attacked Shanghai. Chiang Kai-shek's reactionary regime, which represented the interests of Chinese bureaucratic capital and the feudal landlords, and which acted as a flunkie to imperialism, tyrannised over the Chinese people. It sold out to foreign powers, and, not daring to resist the Japanese aggressors, savagely attacked the Chinese people's revolutionary forces and used every form of extortion and blackmail to exploit the common folk. *The Shop of the Lin Family* describes the rapid impoverishment of the villages and the precarious existence of small shopkeepers at that time. It gives us a cross-section of life in the countryside on the eve of the war of resistance to Japanese aggression.

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Pa Chin, the author of *Comrade Huang Wen-yuan* appearing here slightly abridged, has been writing for over twenty years. His works include the novels *Home*, *New Life* and *Torrent*, as well as many short stories. He is also a brilliant editor who has sponsored the translation of many world classics into Chinese. Pa Chin is now editor of the *Literature and Art Monthly*, published by the Association of Writers in Shanghai. He has translated a number of works himself, and a new edition of his translation of Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* has recently appeared.

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Tang short stories reached their fullest development during the later half of the Tang dynasty (618-907), the rise of this form of literature being closely related to the civil service examination system of that period. The government set these examinations to test the candidates' knowledge of history, literary talent and critical ability; and successful candidates were appointed to official posts. The examiners themselves were senior civil servants. Successful candidates considered the examiner who had passed them as their patron, and themselves as his "pupils." Thus the more "pupils" in administrative posts an official had, the stronger his political position; and there was great competition between high officials to control the examinations. It was customary to present before the examinations an essay to the examiner in order to make a favourable impression. And the short story form was peculiarly suited for this purpose, since in stories candidates could display their knowledge of history as well as their literary and critical gifts. This practice contributed to the development of this literary form, and is one of the chief reasons for the quantity and quality of Tang stories.

This new class of promoted scholars was fond of pleasure, and enjoyed feasting and the company of singsong girls. We find illustrations of this in *Jen the Fox Fairy* and *Story of a Singsong Girl*. The singsong girls or courtesans of the Tang dynasty were usually fairly accomplished:

proficient in music and dancing, good conversationalists and able to read and write. They had much in common with the hetairae of ancient Greece. In spite of their high cultural level, however, their social status was low, and they could only gain their freedom by redeeming themselves with money. If they married a man of good family, they could not become wives, but only concubines. In *Story of a Singsong Girl*, a courtesan becomes the wife of an official; but this must have been a protest against the prevailing social system. In *Jen the Fox Fairy*, a singsong girl (and one who is really a fox) is described as more virtuous than women of good families. This, too, is obviously a powerful satire on the social system.

Tales about fox fairies and dragons who could take human form had a strong hold on the popular imagination in the Tang dynasty, hence even these stories by scholars contain such elements. Apparently these stories were written to please the examiners who enjoyed them. The intellectuals of the feudal nobility, it is clear, had many romantic ideas.

Governor of the Southern Tributary State reflects the Taoist thought of intellectuals of that period. Its main theme is that all is vanity, power and riches come to nothing in the end, and the busy political world is only an ant-heap. But at the same time the story shows that scholars dreamed of becoming prince consorts or ministers, achieving military fame at the frontier or founding large families and acquiring wealth. In the later half of the Tang dynasty the empire began to break up. The central authority of the feudal society weakened, and it was natural for men to dream of setting up new kingdoms far from the prevailing confusion and strife. This thought finds expression in *The Dragon King's Daughter* and *Governor of the Southern Tributary State*.

A great many Tang stories have come down to us. The four presented here are among the best known, and were all written about the ninth century.

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Cheng Chen-to, author of the essay on Tang short stories, is a well-known scholar who has made a notable contribution to the study of Chinese classical literature and the introduction of foreign literature to China. About twenty years ago he edited *Stories Monthly*, a magazine in which many writers first made their name. Ting Ling, Mao Tun and Yeh Sheng-tao all wrote for this magazine. Later Cheng Chen-to edited *World Literature*, a journal which introduced world classics and good editions of Chinese classical works to its readers. He has written a history of world literature, and a history of Chinese literature. Cheng Chen-to is at present director of the Institute of Literary Research of Peking University.

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Li Jo-ping's *North Shensi Sketches* is an example of a form of literature popular in China today. As large-scale industrialisation makes

headway in China, our country scenes are changing. There is activity and new life everywhere. These sketches form a striking contrast to the life described in *The Shop of the Lin Family*. Li Jo-ping is a young writer who has studied in the Institute of Literature set up by the Association of Chinese Writers.

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The illustrations in this number—two modern landscapes and two sections of an ancient painting—are all in the traditional Chinese style.

Ssutu Chiao, who painted *Sunset on Mt. Huashan*, was born in 1902 of a poor family in Kwangtung. His mother was a skilled paper-cut artist, his father a painter in the traditional style; thus he mastered the technique of Chinese painting very early. Apart from traditional Chinese painting, he is also a good painter in oils. And he has introduced what is known as the "bamboo stick style," which utilises the beauty of line of our traditional painting in modern drawings. Ssutu Chiao is now a professor of the Central Art Academy in Peking.

A Spring Shower on the River is by Hsu Pei-hung, who is known for his traditional Chinese ink drawings, oil paintings and sketches. Born in 1895 in Kiangsu, in 1919 he went to France to study Western painting, returning to China in 1927. As a professor of Nankuo Art Academy and head of the Art Department of Central University, in his ceaseless struggle against formalism he laid the foundation for correct technical teaching. In 1933 he went to the Soviet Union to hold an exhibition of modern Chinese art there; while in the same year, on his initiative, exhibitions of Soviet graphic art were held in Shanghai and Nanking. Thus he promoted the cultural exchange between China and the Soviet Union and the mutual understanding of the two peoples. After the inauguration of the People's Republic of China, Hsu was appointed director of the Central Institute of Fine Arts, and elected chairman of the All-China Association of Fine Arts Workers. In 1950 he took part in the First World Peace Congress. In September 1953, the Second All-China Conference of Writers and Artists was held. Although Hsu was in poor health, he was eager to attend this conference. He took the chair at a meeting on September 23, but that same evening he had a stroke and on the 26th he died.

Evening Party is the work of Ku Hung-chung (c. 910-980), a well-known painter. Ku served the last king of the Southern Tang regime, who distrusted Han Hsi-chai, Master of the Grand Secretariat, because he was a northerner. Since Han was fond of music and banquets at night, the king sent the painter to find out what happened at these feasts and what toasts were drunk in the candlelight. Ku memorised this scene, and painted it for the king. The whole painting, 332.5 mm. long and 28.8 mm. high, is divided into five sections, of which two are reproduced in this number. This painting is not only a great work of art, but an excellent record of life in feudal society. *Evening Party* is now on display in the Palace Museum in Peking.

